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# The shield of Achilles and the war on terror : Ekphrasis as critique.

Christopher D. Erickson  
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**THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES AND THE WAR ON TERROR:  
EKPHRASIS AS CRITIQUE**

A Dissertation Presented

by

CHRISTOPHER D. ERICKSON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2006

Department of Political Science

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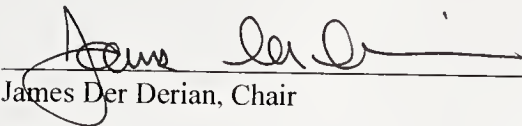
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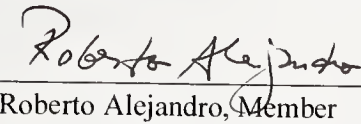
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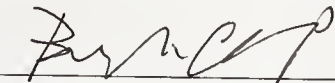
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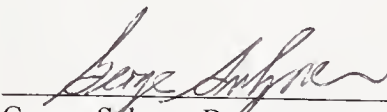
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## **DEDICATION**

For Cindy, Kieren, and Aidan.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has benefited from the guidance of a number of individuals in a variety of settings. Thanks must first be extended to my committee members. Briankle Chang provided assistance with his expertise in the area of semiotics and his unwaveringly positive approach. Roberto Alejandro was of assistance with Plato, Homer and Nietzsche, often providing a useful counterpoint in reference to which my arguments could be better refined. James Der Derian's expertise in the role of representation and simulation in international politics was absolutely invaluable. Their respective areas of expertise complimented and strengthened the arguments formulated herein. I was fortunate enough to have gained valuable feedback thorough lively discussions occasioned by my presentation of the second chapter of the dissertaion at a conference on Terrorism, Democray and Empire at Carelton University in Ottawa, and at the New England Political Science Association's annual conference in Boston. Special thanks is also due to Dennis Kabush who served as an unofficial outside reader, and who gave outstanding intellectual and moral support. Of course, this project would not have been possible were it not for the patience, encouragement, companionship (and forbearance) of my wife, Cindy.

## ABSTRACT

### **THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES AND THE WAR ON TERROR: EKPHRASIS AS CRITIQUE**

MAY 2006

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This dissertation is guided by two central questions. The first question is “Is the War on Terror inevitable?” By comparing the language used by President Bush in a speech given on September 20, 2001 to the language used by Homer in the *Iliad*, particularly his depiction of the shield of Achilles in Book 18, the War on Terror can be recast against a backdrop of mythology rather than fact. It is a tale we tell ourselves about the world, and its status as inevitable is far less convincing. The second guiding question is “How is the appearance of inevitability to be mitigated or resisted?” The second stage of the dissertation addresses the concept of mimesis (representation) as it appears in Plato’s *Republic* and in the work of Baudrillard, as means by which to resist the power of the shield. As critical tools, mimesis and simulacra extend the promise of critical distance, thereby allowing the “thus it is” claim to be understood as an illusion. However, mimesis and simulacra tend to maintain an underlying “thus it is” of their own. The third stage of the argument will challenge the “thus it is” through a discussion of Odysseus and Nietzsche, both of whom teach that life is poesis. The final stage will turn to the concept of ekphrasis, the verbal representation of a non-verbal representation, in order to develop it as a tool useful for critical theorists. Ekphrasis has

the advantage of both recognizing the power of mimetic representation and disrupting it. The dissertation will conclude with an ekphrastic reading of the September 20, 2001 speech.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001 two hijacked airliners loaded with fuel slammed into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre. Another hit the Pentagon and a fourth crashed in a field in rural Pennsylvania. On September 20, 2001, President George W. Bush stood before a joint session of Congress and pronounced a War on Terror. His insistence that "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists"<sup>1</sup> was one of the opening salvos in a rhetorical bombardment that has worked to confirm the presence of what Samuel Huntington has famously dubbed a "clash of civilizations."<sup>2</sup> This Huntingtonian theory has deeply influenced those in the Bush Administration and the neoconservative agenda it pursues. In the words of Emran Qureshi, the premise of this theory is that

such a clash is not the product of particular historical circumstances that can change but that the essence of Islam as a religion is antipathetic to the fundamental core values of the West; that Islam is inherently violent in nature; and that, therefore, violent acts against the West are inevitable and are provoked not by any particular grievances or set of circumstances but by the very existence of Western civilization.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George W Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, 20 September, 2001* (2001 [cited December 15 2004]); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/print/20010920-8.htm>., 30. The full text of the speech is given in Appendix A. All further references will be to paragraph number.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993).

<sup>3</sup> Emran Qureshi and Martin A. Sells, "Introduction," in *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Martin A. Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p.2. Qureshi is less than charitable in his reading



This dissertation is guided by two central questions. The first question is "Is the War on Terror inevitable?" There can be little doubt that it has been presented as such.<sup>4</sup> Even a passing familiarity with the rhetorical pronouncements of the warring parties makes this abundantly clear. An answer to this question will begin by looking more closely at the speech of September 20, 2001. The argument to follow will show that despite claims to the contrary, the War on Terror is not inevitable. This leads to the

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and his interpretation does overstate Huntington's position. In the 1993 article, Huntington says:

differences among civilizations are not only real; they are basic. Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion. The people of different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. These differences are the product of centuries. They will not soon disappear. They are far more fundamental than differences among political ideologies and political regimes. Differences do not necessarily mean conflict, and conflict does not necessarily mean violence. Over the centuries, however, differences among civilizations have generated the most prolonged and the most violent conflicts.

Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," p.23.

Huntington therefore does not see these differences as a natural part of an ontologically fixed reality. However in spite of this he does go on in the article to all but eradicate the importance of this observation by treating these cultural differences as if they were fixed. Although Qureshi overstates Huntington's position, he does not overstate the premises of others, including key figures in the Bush Administration, who have adopted Huntington's theory.

<sup>4</sup> Others have dealt noted this consistency. For example, see Jenny Adkins and Maja Zehfuss, "Generalising the International," *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (2005).; Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling, "Power and Play through Poisies: Reconstructing Self and the Other in the 9/11 Commission Report," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (2005).; Chris Brown, "Reflections on the 'War on Terror', 2 Years On," *International Politics* 41, no. 1 (2004).; David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003).; Emran Qureshi and Martin A. Sells, eds., *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

second guiding question: “How is the appearance of inevitability to be mitigated or resisted?” The largest portion of the dissertation will address this question.

The phrasing of the second question is broad, and deliberately so. The War on Terror, or more specifically the rhetoric coming from the Bush Administration regarding the War on Terror, will serve as a centre of gravity around which the argument will orbit. Yet the import of the argument goes beyond the example used to articulate it. A case in point, although the focus is on the language of the Bush Administration, the observations and analysis could also be made of the language of Osama bin Laden, or any of a range of individuals and groups that share the structural features of such “all or nothing” language in their pronouncements. The breadth of the question is also potentially misleading. In saying that an answer will be provided, the argument will proceed to do just that - to provide *an* answer. There is no claim here that the argument provides *the* answer, as such a claim would in the end perpetuate the problem the argument attempts to remedy. Given the focus on language it is not surprising that the means of resistance discussed in the argument to come is drawn from the field of literary criticism. That tool is *ekphrasis*, the verbal representation of a non-verbal representation.

Methodologically, the aim of this argument is akin to Geertz’s “thick description” in that it shares his assumption that culture, including political culture, is semiotic.

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the

analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning.<sup>5</sup>

Public pronouncements by political figures are intended to have an effect on public opinion in regards to a given policy decision. Speeches are made to convince an audience of the rightness or wrongness, desirability or undesirability, benefit or cost of some policy. These speeches become at least part of the background against which decisions have been, are, or will be made and against which public opinion is formed. They are strands of the webs of significance we spin for ourselves. "Our double task is to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects' acts, the 'said' of social discourse, and to construct a system of analysis in those terms what is generic to those structures."<sup>6</sup>

Geertz insists that "thick description" is not directed towards causal prediction, but can provide a sense of anticipation. The important implication of this is that the context within which a decision is made or a policy direction chosen does not determine that choice, but may anticipate which choices are more likely to be made. A visible figure only ever appears against an invisible background. Of course any particular background can become visible, but only as a figure against some other (invisible) background. This is an important observation because it is not just sense data that appear this way. The same can be said of policy options as figures. The figures that appear depend entirely on the background against which they appear, or on the context in which they are articulated.

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<sup>5</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.27.

For example, the binary set of options expressed in President Bush's "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" appear as the only viable options given a background understanding of the world as unambiguously divided between "good" and "evil" camps. This does not pose a problem, nor even appear as one, from the perspective of George W. Bush or those sharing his neoconservative ideology. It would be problematic from the perspective of, let us say, the French. The American led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was packaged as a continuation of the War on Terror. If the binary option set named above were valid, then the French would have had no other choice but to either join with or fight against the Americans. One would be hard pressed to say that the government of President Chirac embraced the agenda of al Qaeda, but neither did it embrace the agenda of the Bush Administration. This example indicates that the background against which the original option set appears is not the only background against which options can appear. With this in mind, the argument will proceed based on the following premises:

- 1.) Policy decisions are made based on the rational selection of the best option among a range of options. The apparent nod to the rational choice model here is conditioned by the observation that "rationality" is itself embedded in a contingent web of significance, and does not exist outside of such a web. What is "reasonable" at one place and time may not be so in another. The entire understanding of "the rational" as a conceptual category is itself subject to alteration.
- 2.) The range of likely options is not the same as the range of all possible options. The framing of options has much to do with prevalent (normative) interpretations of the context within which they are articulated. This is simply to say that the way one thinks of the world is closely related to how one lives in the world.



- 3.) These frames can be (and often are) presented as a set of simple or natural facts about the world and therefore not open to question. They are bracketed from further inquiry.

It will argued that the bracketing of the frames *can* be challenged and that doing so can broaden the range of policy options available in a given situation.<sup>7</sup>

Such a challenge will begin using an approach similar to what Skocpol and Somers have called “comparative history as the parallel demonstration of theory.”<sup>8</sup> In this approach, “historical instances are juxtaposed to demonstrate that the theoretical arguments apply convincingly to multiple cases that ought to fit if the theory in question is indeed valid.”<sup>9</sup> The approach here is *akin* to this in that an historical case – the War on Terror – will be juxtaposed with a *mythological* case – Homer’s account of the Trojan War. In making this comparison the argument will show that the War on Terror can be understood as appearing against a background of mythology rather than fact.<sup>10</sup> The “theory in question” in this case is that political speeches, like mythology, are

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<sup>7</sup> On the role of frames and framing in politics, see George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know That Liberals Don't* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), George Lakoff, *Simple Framing: An Introduction to Framing and Its Use in Politics* (2005 [cited January 12 2006]); available from [http://www.rockridgeinstitute.org/projects/simple\\_framing](http://www.rockridgeinstitute.org/projects/simple_framing), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>8</sup> Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 2 (1980).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.: p.176.

<sup>10</sup> This is in accord with, albeit a mirror image of, the logic guiding the 19<sup>th</sup> century archaeologist Heinrich Schlieman who sought to uncover the historical Troy, thereby recasting that conflict against a backdrop of fact rather than myth.

textual constructs subject to textual analysis rather than uncontested presentations of fact.

Why Homer? Irving Kristol, the oft named and self-avowed "Godfather of Neoconservatism" has said, "the favorite neoconservative text on foreign affairs, thanks to professors Leo Strauss of Chicago and Donald Kagan of Yale, is Thucydides on the Peloponnesian War."<sup>11</sup> Thucydides, who's work is often cited as a key text in the canon of realism,<sup>12</sup> wrote at a time when Western traditions of thought tend to understand themselves as emerging from the mythological fog of the past onto the solid ground of empirical facts. This is quite evident in the work of Plato in which Socrates and his insistence on logical reasoning is often represented as a direct challenger to Achilles as the central cultural (heroic) figure.<sup>13</sup> So too can it be seen in the shift of both perspective and aim between the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides.<sup>14</sup> Where Herodotus is still prone to flights into what might be labelled mythological fancy, excerpts from Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War are routinely called upon

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<sup>11</sup> Irving Kristol, "The Neoconservative Persuasion," *The Weekly Standard* 008, no. 47 (2003).

<sup>12</sup> This list of authors most often includes, *inter alia*, Clausewitz, Hobbes and Machiavelli. To be most precise, it is not the whole of Thucydides' text that is drawn upon. Most often it is Pericles' funeral oration and the Melian dialogue that garner the most attention.

<sup>13</sup> This is a recurrent theme in Plato's work. For an early example, see Plato, "Apology," in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> See Thucydides and Steven Lattimore, *The Peloponnesian War* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998); Herodotus, Michael A. Flower, and John Marincola, *Histories, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics*. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).



as evidence of the veracity of the realists' claims to "tell it like it is."<sup>15</sup> Writing in 1939, Simone Weil states that:

Those who had dreamed that force, thanks to progress now belonged to the past, have seen the [*Iliad*] as a historic document; those who can see that force, today as in the past, is at the centre of all human history, find the *Iliad* its most beautiful, its purest mirror.<sup>16</sup>

It is difficult to read this quote without finding in it an accurate description of the position adopted by neoconservatives such as Richard Perle and David Frum that force is indeed "at the centre of all human history." It is most intriguing that this same position, which takes such pride in itself as simply relaying the facts of the world as it is, which places such an emphasis on the empirical and rational underpinnings of its prescriptions and proscriptions, should find its "most beautiful, its purest mirror" in mythology. The *Iliad* is, of course, the epic tale of another, far older, arguably archetypal "clash of civilizations."<sup>17</sup> It depicts, one may say, "the mother of all" such clashes. How fitting to examine one epic struggle from the vantage point of another? The discussion of Homer will focus on Book 18 of the *Iliad* where he describes the shield of Achilles.

The shield of Achilles presents its audience with a divinely sanctioned overview of the world. It makes the claim "thus it is" and implies the corresponding ethos "there

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<sup>15</sup> Neoconservatives consider themselves the rightful heirs of the canonical tradition of realism in so far as they insist that they "tell it like it is."

<sup>16</sup> Simone Weil, "The *Iliad* or the Poem of Force," in *Critical Essays on Homer*, ed. Kenneth Atchity, Ron Hogart, and Doug Price (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1987), p.153.

<sup>17</sup> On the concept of the archetype, see Carl Jung, ed., *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1964) p.58.

is nothing to be done about it.” This same double claim is to be found in the rhetorical (re)presentation of the War on Terror. The purpose of this double claim is to induce a kind of paralysis on the part of the audience. Resistance becomes impossible. Yet the “bearing of the shield” is not a sufficient condition for this pernicious, Medusa-like effect to take hold.<sup>18</sup> It is also required that the audience accepts the “thus it is” at face value. It follows that resistance to the effects of the shield must be rooted in a challenge to the “thus it is” claim.

This is a critical point of departure along a variety of vectors. First, it is at this point that the analysis offered by the argument moves from observation to intervention, thereby diverting from the “scientific” insistence upon neutral objectivity. This departure is very much in line with a key feminist challenge to traditional methodological approaches. Patricia Siplon states, “the problem of losing ‘objectivity’ is formidable only if the researcher genuinely believes that objectivity is both desirable and achievable, something a host of scholars, led by feminist theorists, have questioned.”<sup>19</sup> She then quotes Sandra Harding as saying “scientific beliefs, practices, institutions, histories, and problematics are constituted in and through contemporary

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<sup>18</sup> The shield of Achilles is a central metaphor and “the bearing of the shield” is a phrase that will recur often in this dissertation. It is used in what George Lakoff would call a prototypical sense.

A prototype is an element of a category (either subcategory or an individual member) that is used to represent the category as a whole in some sort of reasoning. *All prototypes are cognitive constructions used to perform a certain kind of reasoning: they are not objective features of the world.* Lakoff, *Moral Politics* p.9.

<sup>19</sup> Patricia Siplon, “Scholar, Witness or Activist? The Lessons and Dilemmas of an Aids Research Agenda,” *PSOnline* (1999).

political and social projects, and always have been.”<sup>20</sup> It is exactly this point that the present argument highlights by displaying the War on Terror against a mythological backdrop. This move alone alters the status of the “thus it is” claim.

The call for resistance *via* a challenge to the “thus it is” claim requires a questioning of the unquestionable. The “thus it is” claim (re)presents for its audience a backdrop against which policy options appear as viable or not, and opinions acceptable or not. If these background conditions are to be questioned, it will not do to employ any method that accepts them as premises. Put differently, if the task is to challenge the bearing of the shield, it is neither appropriate nor possible to do so utilizing a method that is itself a bearer of the shield. This will be demonstrated in the dissertation as it turns to the second of its guiding questions: “How is the appearance of inevitability to be mitigated or resisted?”

Keeping with mythological metaphors, two figures are prominent in their ability to offer resistance to the irresistible, *vis.* Perseus and Paris. Perseus is able to defeat Medusa by avoiding her direct gaze. He relies instead on the distance offered by a reflection, a simulation. Paris too is successful in defeating the invincible Achilles precisely because he does not face the shield, but maintains his distance from it. Critical distance is the key to success for both, and critical distance is equally important for the theorist. Critical distance, from the point of view of the theorist, is similar to objectivity in that the observer (the theorist or researcher) is somewhat removed from the object observed, thereby permitting an otherwise unavailable sense of perspective. At the same time critical distance directly contradicts objectivity in that the distance is

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

not sought so as to *detach* one's self but so as to bring one's object or target *within range*. *Interdiction* and not detachment is the operative guide.

How is the power of the shield to be resisted? The second stage of the dissertation addresses the concept of mimesis (representation) as a means by which to resist. Perseus's approach is shared by Plato - under the rubric of mimesis - and by Baudrillard - under the rubric of simulacra, a later development of mimesis. As critical tools, mimesis and simulacra extend the promise of critical distance, thereby allowing the "thus it is" claim to be understood as an illusion: "Thus it is like" masquerading as "thus it is." However both are also guilty of bearing the shield. In Plato's *Republic*, the concept of mimesis is used to make a direct attack on Homer. Homer's representations of the world are exposed as imitations and distortions of the world, which does indeed open up the possibility that these illusions will be less easily accepted at face value. Yet a closer look at the way Plato makes this argument in *The Republic* shows that he merely postpones the problem.

Plato's mimesis relies on a clear distinction between the real and the illusory. His famous metaphor of the cave in Book VI spells out the distinction rather beautifully. Be that as it may, by doing this he replaces what he sees as a Homeric "thus it is" with his own "thus it *really* is." He is left with the same problem he had hoped to resolve. He may have stripped the shield from the hands of Homer, but now he carries it himself.

Baudrillard's notions of simulacra and the hyperreal also promise to provide critical distance. Like Geertz, he too adopts a semiotic approach. He sees the sign as

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having four historical phases. The first two phases – the sign as a reflection of reality and the sign as a distortion of reality – correspond nicely to Plato's good and bad mimesis. In the third phase the sign serves to conceal the absence of an underlying reality, and in the fourth, the sign ceases to make any reference whatsoever. Signs become pure simulacra.<sup>21</sup>

Utilizing this perspective, Baudrillard offers an analysis of the War on Terror. In his short text, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, he takes up a number of themes that are prominent throughout his works. In particular he discusses the role of the twin towers of The World Trade Centre as

the visible sign of the closure of a system in the vertigo of doubling while the other skyscrapers are each the original moment of a system continually surpassing itself in the crisis and the challenge.<sup>22</sup>

The collapse of the towers indicates a collapse, or rather an *implosion* of that closed system of communication. In spite of the undeniable suffering of thousands upon thousands of people, Baudrillard says that the power of the September 11 attacks rests not in their physical destructiveness, but in their symbolic disruptiveness. And yet although the symbolic heart of this system collapsed, the system itself did not. Rather it has reasserted itself, in a very literal sense, *forcefully*. Great effort has been put into reabsorbing the event into its simulation.

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<sup>21</sup> Mark Poster, ed., *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, ed. Michael Featherstone, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, *Theory, Culture & Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1993) p.69-70.

Where Plato encounters the problem of bearing the shield by his reliance on Being, Baudrillard encounters the problem by (seemingly) doing away with Being altogether. Once the fourth phase of the sign is reached and the hyperreal takes over, there is no going back. *What is becomes a perfect reflection of what it is believed ought to be.* A feedback loop is generated by the proximity of model and representation so that the difference between the two vanishes.<sup>23</sup> The ideal is perfected in the image and all difference collapses into sameness from which there is no escape route. Baudrillard's insistence on the ubiquity of illusion gets as far as "thus it isn't" - which is simply a veiled "thus it is" - but remains locked in to the ethos of "there is nothing to be done." He too bears the shield.<sup>24</sup>

The approach adopted by Perseus, as well as by both Plato and Baudrillard of utilizing the representation, does not, in the end, deliver on the promise of critical distance. Perseus succeeds in decapitating Medusa, but this does not extinguish the power of her gaze. Similarly, in attempting to mitigate the effects of the shield, both Plato and Baudrillard end up carrying it. The question remains as to how one is to escape this problem?

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<sup>23</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, trans. Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> Perseus himself encounters a similar problem. After Medusa is defeated, her gaze retains its power. The defeat of one particular use of that power may have been defeated, but the problem persists. It is only resolved when Perseus decides that it is too dangerous for any human to wield. He gives the head of Medusa to Athena as he is returning her mirrored shield. She affixes the Gorgon's visage to that shield. The power of the "thus it is" rightfully belongs only in the hands of a god. It should also be noted that the shield of Achilles is prefigured in the *Iliad* by the shield carried to battle by Agamemnon, which also bears the image of Medusa upon it. See Appendix C: The Shield of Agamemnon.



How is the power of the shield to be resisted? The third stage of the dissertation will look to the fate of the shield after the death of Achilles. The shield presents itself as invulnerable and impenetrable. The death of Achilles indicates both the hollowness of this claim and the danger inherent in believing in it too much. This is a lesson that remains unlearned by Ajax who would claim the shield, and by Neoptolemus, who bears it. The inability of either character to comprehend the dangers of the shield leads to their deaths. Both Ajax and Neoptolemus are undone by their stubborn insistence on their own transparency of motivation and purpose. They are in this sense one-dimensional. They are already predisposed to the easy acceptance of "thus it is" type claims. Odysseus, on the other hand, is different. He wins the *right* to bear the shield, but never *actually* bears it.

Odysseus understands the power of illusion rendered possible by the shield. He already knows that any claim to "tell it like it is" is always much more problematic than it would make itself seem. He is already a master of strategy, deception, and trickery, hence he is both a suitable bearer of the shield, and has no need to bear it. He has no need to as he is already aware of the lesson it can teach – namely that a claim to certain knowledge, "thus it is", is always a means to some other end. Odysseus is exemplary in not being taken in by his own tales, by his own representations of himself and the world to others. He is able, in other words, to maintain a critical distance from his own (dis)simulations. He is able to embrace the poesis intertwined in his mimesis.

Odysseus is forever making and remaking himself. He is a difficult figure because he both resides in and overturns the value system of heroes such as Ajax and Achilles. He disturbs the easy lines between noble and base, honorable and

dishonorable, truthful and untruthful. To borrow a phrase from Friedrich Nietzsche, Odysseus opens up a horizon of possibilities “beyond good and evil.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, it is to Nietzsche’s work that the dissertation next turns. Specific attention is given to his focus on language and his challenge to the Platonic notions of Being that underpin the very possibility of making “thus it is” claims.

What the character of Odysseus suggests, Friedrich Nietzsche develops. Nietzsche does see in Homer an emphasis on “artfulness above all else,”<sup>26</sup> but rather than rejecting this as somehow removed from the truth, as Plato does, he celebrates it. What Nietzsche points out is that the unfathomability of art, its illusion and mystery, are required, even by science that self-avowedly seeks to dispel such things. The whole of human cultural development, he tells us, is best understood not as a dialectical operation in which a thesis and its antithesis are both overcome in a linearly progressive synthesis, but in terms of the interminable tensions between what he calls the Apollonian and Dionysian drives. The interplay between the two is that between order and chaos, individuation and its complete dissolution, in becoming god and becoming animal. Both Apollo and Dionysus, as Nietzsche makes abundantly clear, require the other in a constant making and unmaking of claims to show the world “as it is.” The error of the anti-Dionysian Socrates, as Nietzsche sees it, is that he has bought fully into what can only be, at best, a partial truth. His emphasis on aesthetics reorients the framework

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<sup>25</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil; Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966). Hereafter *BGE*.

<sup>26</sup> The phrase is from L. Pratt, quoted in Barbara Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's Odyssey*, ed. Gregory Nagy, *Greek Studies: Interdisciplinary Studies* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004) p.78n.59.

employed by Plato, and ironically preserved by Baudrillard. The role of Nietzsche's new philosopher is not to contemplate the truth and to pronounce, "thus it is."

*Actual philosophers...are commanders and law givers: they say "thus it shall be!", it is they who determine the Wherefore and the Whither of mankind...they reach for the future with creative hand, and everything that is or has been becomes for them a means, an instrument, a hammer. Their "knowing" is creating, their creating is law giving, their will to truth is - will to power.*<sup>27</sup>

It is with Nietzsche and his turn to the role of language in the creation of knowledge that one can see the broad scope of life as poetic. This shift brings us closer to an answer of the question of how to resist the power of the shield. The strategic approach of Perseus is a hazardous one, and this is especially the case after Nietzsche's pronouncement that "God is dead!"<sup>28</sup> Perseus, after all, was able to turn his lethal prize over to the gods for safekeeping. No such possibility remains after Nietzsche. Another strategy is required.

Again, whow is the power of the shield to be resisted? One strategy is to be found in Paris. Paris the archer, son of Priam, prince of Troy, brings down Achilles precisely by not facing the shield. Rather than facing the shield directly, he launches his attack *from the margins* of the battlefield. It is precisely because he maintains his distance that he is able to resist the further advancement of the shield. Nietzsche, one of the forefathers and progenitors of deconstruction once said:

The struggle against Plato, or, to express it more plainly and for 'the people', the struggle against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia - for Christianity is Platonism 'for the people' - has created in

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<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, *Bge* p.211.

<sup>28</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra : A Book for Everyone and No One*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, *Penguin Classics*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) p.12.

Europe a magnificent tension of the spirit such as has never existed on earth before: with so tense a bow one can now shoot for the most distant targets... We *good Europeans* and free, *very free* spirits – we have it still, the whole need of the spirit and the whole tension of its bow! And perhaps also the arrow, the task and, who knows? The *target*...<sup>29</sup>

Deconstruction as a critical tool works *from the margins* of a text to show how the text works against itself. It begins from the same assumptions as Geertz's semiotic approach, but takes those assumptions much further. Where Geertz is a structuralist, following in the tradition of Claude Levi-Strauss, deconstruction is a tool of the post-structuralists. Where structuralists insist that meaning is only to be found through an understanding of the context within which a given event occurs – the “webs of significance [Man] himself has spun”- post-structuralists argue that the implication of these very webs themselves is that the universe becomes *decentered*. That is to say that meaning for human beings is autopoietic. It is always mediated through language and does not derive from any strict correspondence to “the real world.” There is no *certain* benchmark against which to measure anything.

If knowledge is poetic, if it is a *text*, then it should be possible to subject it to textual analysis. Erich Auerbach in his central work *Mimesis* effectively demonstrates how the concept of mimesis itself can be employed to reveal the poesis built into it.<sup>30</sup> He does this by comparing one instance of mimesis with another. On the assumption that each example provides what was considered to be a “life like” portrayal of events, one is free to notice the obvious stylistic differences between them. As one encounters

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<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, *Bge*.

<sup>30</sup> See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).



the divergent examples of mimesis presented in his book, it becomes more and more difficult to simply accept the existence of an underlying, unchanging reality (Being) that speaks for itself. This is a valuable approach when more than a single example is ready to hand. But is there a theoretical tool that renders it possible to make the same observations within a single example?

Just such a tool is to be found within the ground already covered by the present investigation. Homer's description of the shield of Achilles is recognised as the archetypical example of *ekphrasis*. Originally used to mean any description, the term has come to refer to the verbal representation of physical (non-verbal) representation.<sup>31</sup> As a literary term, this has most often been used in the context of works of art being described in poetry. This argument hopes to develop the use of ekphrasis as a tool useful in the field of critical political theory.

The greatest advantage to ekphrasis is that it is able to provide and sustain the kind of critical distance mimesis has difficulty sustaining. Mimesis can open a space for questions by at least suggesting the difference between the "original" and its representation. Seen through the lens of mimesis, the claim of Achilles' shield cannot be "thus it is" but only "thus it is something like." This gap immediately suggests the questions "how is it different?" and "could it be otherwise?" However the enchanting effects (*thlaxis*) of mimesis work to quickly close this gap. Ekphrasis on the other hand can open the same gap, and then widen it. It does this by calling attention to the

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<sup>31</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Ekphrasis and the Other* (University of Chicago Press, 1994 [cited April 12 2004]); available from <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/shelley/medusa/mitchell.html#one>.

representation as a creation, as *poiesis*. Andrew Sprague Becker breaks down ekphrasis into four component parts. These are:

- 1.) *Res ipsae* – the referent or that which is represented by the work described.
- 2.) *Opus ipsum* – the physical medium of the work.
- 3.) *Artifex et ars* – a focus on the creator and the creation.
- 4.) *Animadversor* – a detached commentary on the effect of or reaction to the work on the part of the observer, and by extension, the audience.<sup>32</sup>

Although this dissertation will make use of his methodological formula, if you will, it differs from Becker's project in that it demonstrates the usefulness of ekphrasis as a critical tool beyond the scope of the analysis of poetry. It argues, in other words, for a much wider application than Becker has in mind.

Mimesis as a critical tool promises to expose the representation as a representation. However it does this by reference to the "real thing" behind the image. At the same time the mimetic image, if it is to be truly effective, works to conceal itself as an image. Ekphrasis, on the other hand both recognises the power of mimesis, by means of the *res ipsae* and *opus ipsum*, and backs away from that image, by the *artifex et ars* and especially the *animadversor*. Where mimesis presents an enchanting image, ekphrasis allows for that same image, but then says to the reader (the observer or researcher) "what an enchanting image this is." Thus in a deeply ironic move, by highlighting the power of the enchantment, it breaks the enchantment.

Ekphrasis renders the bearing of the shield impossible except in so far as it is borne as a (dis)simulation, a tool for the obtainment of some other end. Ekphrasis is a reminder to the audience that they claims they are presented cannot be of the type "thus

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<sup>32</sup> Andrew Sprague Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995) p.42.

it is.” Counter to the claims of the shield, the audience is not presented with the world as it is, nor even with a representation of the world as it is. They are presented instead with a representation of a representation; with something like something like. This is not the same as saying that there is no real world, or that “anything goes”, but it is to say that access to that world is never immediate (unmediated).<sup>33</sup> Any claims about that world must therefore be uncertain and any “thus it is” claim must be rejected outright as there is no available perspective, standpoint or grounds from which to make such a claim.

Becker’s four part schema of ekphrasis allows him to draw useful insights from close readings of Homer and other ekphrastic poets. This dissertation will take his four part schema and show how it can be applied to texts not normally considered poetry. Thus the dissertation will conclude where it began, with a close reading of the September 20, 2001 speech by President Bush. Only this time around, the speech will read as an example of ekphrasis. By showing the claims made to be less than they appear, the argument intends to show how the conclusions regarding the *inevitability* of the conflict and the *necessity* of the policy decisions made in its execution are themselves illusory.

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<sup>33</sup> It is to take seriously Socrates’ seemingly paradoxical understanding that “I only know that I do not know anything.”

## CHAPTER II

### THE GOD OF FIRE'S GIFT: THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES AND THE WAR ON TERROR

In the context of the current conflict, there has been a steady stream of messages from President Bush and those around him that the world is a fearful place where constant vigilance is requisite and the consequences of “dreaming” dire.<sup>34</sup> We are told the appropriate response to this pervasive fear is to employ force, “to end this evil before it kills again and on a genocidal scale. There is no middle way for Americans: It is victory or holocaust.”<sup>35</sup> The overwhelming ferocity of this response is intended to “shock and awe” the opponent into paralysis. It can be said that those who profess such

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<sup>34</sup> This is the daydream of the idealist, criticized by the likes of E.H. Carr and other adherents of the realist approach to understanding international relations. Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1964). The “dreaming” objected to by neoconservatives akin to that discussed by Plato in *The Republic* when he says:

Is this not dreaming, namely, whether asleep or awake, to think that a likeness is not a likeness but the reality which it resembles? Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974) 476c.

The dire consequences of the dream are that one will be utterly overtaken by the real, lost in one's own illusions. (Ironically, the scope of the dream may extend much further than the realists may wish to admit, as is implied in much of the later chapters of this dissertation.) This is different from the dire consequences of the dream as outlined by Osama Bin Laden. For Bin Laden, the dream has a prophetic function. It is an avenue by which insight into the unknown and unknowable might be gained. Dreams of airplanes and tall buildings in the lead up to September 11, 2001 threatened to expose his plans. For a discussion see James Der Derian, *Dreams, Lies, and Videotapes* (2001 [cited December 20 2005]); available from <http://www.watsoninstitute.org/infopeace/911/index.cfm?id=8>.

<sup>35</sup> Frum and Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* p.9.



rhetoric advance carrying the shield of Achilles, the mere sight of which led “each fighter [to shrink] away.”<sup>36</sup> This observation is indicative of the intent of this argument to recast the War on Terror as a myth. This is not to say that it is not really happening. Nor is it to say that it does not produce tangible, even devastating effects. To recast the War on Terror as a myth is to open the possibility that the conflict and the stark options it presents are not as inevitable as it may otherwise seem. Although a variety of speeches delivered by President Bush and those within his administration can and do serve to highlight specific points of argument, I will focus on a comparison of Homer’s account of the shield of Achilles with a speech delivered by President Bush to a joint session of Congress on 20 September, 2001.<sup>37</sup>

Homer’s account of the shield of Achilles presents its audience with an overview of the cosmos as seen from the unimpeachable vantage point of the divine. Corresponding to the divinely inspired claim “thus it is” is an ethos that can be stated, “there is nothing to be done.” The difficult, yet only acceptable response is to embrace

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<sup>36</sup> The leap from the War on Terror and the war in Iraq to the Trojan War may not at first seem the most obvious, but it is not random. Over the past few years there has been a notable fascination with the epic struggles of mythological heroes. An exploration of why this should be is best left to the Jungians, but examples of this referring specifically Homeric themes range from a made for television version of the *Odyssey*, to Philip Bobbitt’s book, Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles War, Peace, and the Course of History*, 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 2002).) See also James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001). Of course there is also to the recent film *Troy*, starring Brad Pitt as Achilles. (It should be noted that the Hollywood rendition of Homer’s *Iliad*, though entertaining enough, departs significantly from the story of the *Iliad* and is not the focus of discussion in this paper. However, one suspects there is another set of analogies to be drawn between the film and the contemporary political situation, just as one might be mildly surprised that the role of Agamemnon was not cast by an actor with a faux-Texas drawl.)

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix A.

one's fate and play one's role. This same logic, this same interaction between cosmos and ethos, is in play in much of the rhetoric surrounding the War on Terror.

Despite the many similarities between the worldview offered on the shield and that offered by the Bush Administration, there is one major difference that will be discussed. Where Homer emphasises the similarities between the combatants, Bush emphasises the utter incompatibility between "us" and "them." The presence of this distinction is not particularly remarkable in itself, but when seen against the mythological backdrop of Homer's epic, the consequences of this distinction becomes chillingly clear.

### **The 30 Second Iliad**

"Rage – Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles..."(1:1)<sup>38</sup>

The opening line of Homer's *Iliad* is very clear as to its main topic. The enraged Achilles, greatest of all Greek heroes, makes the decision to stop fighting after King Agamemnon publicly humiliates him. In his absence, the war goes badly for the Greeks. As the Trojans are about to reach the Greek ships, Achilles' friend Patroclus pleads with him to return to battle. Achilles refuses, still consumed by his rage towards Agamemnon, but permits Patroclus to don his armour so that the Trojans might believe Achilles has returned. Patroclus manages to frighten away the main force of the Trojans, but is then killed by Hector, son of the Trojan king and the mightiest of the

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<sup>38</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1990). Throughout the dissertation, all references to Homer's epic are taken from Robert Fagles' translation. Given the preponderance of available translations, all references will be provided in parentheses within the text using the format (Book:Line(s)).

Trojan warriors. Hector strips Patroclus of Achilles' armour, taking it for himself. When Achilles hears of the death of Patroclus, he decides to redirect his rage away from Agamemnon and towards the Trojans. Before he can reenter the battle, his mother, the goddess Thetis, makes him promise not to fight until she returns with a new set of armour for him. Thetis flies up to Mount Olympus where she begs Hephaestus, the god of fire, to make this gift. Achilles accepts the arms from his mother - a breastplate, a helmet, greaves, and most significantly, a shield- and plunges back into the bloody thick of the fight. His murderous rampage eventually results in the death of Hector. After killing Hector, Achilles ties the body to the back of his war cart and drags the fallen hero through the Greek camp. Having thus offended the gods, Achilles is ordered to return the body by a messenger from Zeus. Priam, the Trojan king, sneaks into the Greek camp with the help of the gods and begs for the return of his son's body. The epic concludes with the reconciliation between Achilles and Priam and the funeral of Hector.

### **The Shield of Achilles**

The shield that Thetis provides to her son is notable in Homer's epic. Nowhere else does he devote so many lines to the description of a single object.<sup>39</sup> Homer is quick to point out the terrible power of the shield saying that at its mere presence "a tremor ran through all the Myrmidon ranks – none dared to look straight at the glare, each fighter shrank away." (19:17-18) Despite the reaction of his allies and kinsmen, the images do not appear on the surface to be fearful at all. The shield depicts the earth and sky, sun and moon and the constellations. There are also images of a city at peace

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<sup>39</sup> The relevant passages from Book 18 are included as Appendix B.

and a city at war. The former is complete with wedding celebrations and court cases. The latter contains the expected depictions of carnage and strife, but these should not have been overly frightful to veteran soldiers in the tenth year of an ongoing war. Aside from this there are images of a more pastoral nature – the ploughing and planting of fields, a king's estate, the growing and harvesting of barley and grapes, a herd of cattle set upon by lions, a dancing circle filled with young dancers and tumblers. Largely absent are the standard images of terror to be found on other shields described by Homer. There are no mythical beasts, no Gorgons or Griffins, no serpents or Sphinxes, nor even that much straightforward gore.

Another notable feature is that Homer's description of the shield is more of a narrative than an exposition. He does provide some detail as to the materials and expert craftsmanship of the various scenes, but most strikingly and most engagingly he retells the story of each scene. The audience is drawn into these stories to an extent that it is quite easy to forget that the poet is describing a particular object. The shield is an interesting feature within Homer's epic and it raises equally interesting questions.

The shield of Achilles can be spoken of in many ways. It can be taken at face value as an object preexisting its description by Homer. It can be treated as existing only in its description. It can be treated figuratively and archetypically as a model for specific types of truth claims. The shield is therefore an object, a description, a claim, and a model of any such truth claims.

The shield as an object has multiple functions, not all of them equally obvious. First, it is a tool for the provision of physical protection - a mobile wall behind which



the body of its carrier may take shelter. Yet it is important to remember that all but the heel of Achilles is invulnerable, his mother having dipped him in the river Styx as an infant.<sup>40</sup> But if this is the case, what is the purpose of this new armour? Its purpose cannot be strictly protection as this would be redundant. Nor, for that matter does the armour provide any form of protection for his single vulnerable part. An indication of this second function is provided in the text when Thetis says to Achilles "Hector *glories* in your armour, strapped across his back." (18:156)<sup>41</sup> The clear indication is that that which the armour most protects is not the body, but the status of its bearer. Hector glories in the armour as an outward sign of his superiority over Achilles, and therefore over all the Achaeans.<sup>42</sup> The armour serves to situate the bearer within a social order.

### **The Arms of Agamemnon**

Agamemnon's armour is a useful model and comparison in this respect.<sup>43</sup> The king's armour, described in some detail by Homer (11:19-52) has an obvious function

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<sup>40</sup> Alternately it is said that his mother held him over the fire of immortality in order to burn away all mortal parts of him. See Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (New York: George Brazillier, Inc., 1955).

<sup>41</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> By wearing the armour, Hector claims his superiority, but as anyone familiar with the events of the epic will immediately recognise, the making of the claim and the veracity of the claim are not one and the same.

<sup>43</sup> The intimate connection between the notable individual and their specific armaments is to be found throughout the *Iliad*. Witness Telamonian Ajax's tower shield, Nestor's chariot, Pandarus' bow, Hector's "flashing helm." See Blair Campbell, "The Epic Hero as Politico," *History of Political Thought* 11, no. 2 (1990), Ian C. Johnston, *The Ironies of War: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988).

in its protectiveness, but it also serves to show Agamemnon's status.<sup>44</sup> The exquisite craftsmanship of the object itself speaks to the wealth and nobility of its bearer. Furthermore, the Gorgon's head emblazoned on a glittering shield echoes the shield of Athena, the warrior goddess of wisdom. In carrying the shield then, Agamemnon is staking a claim to a status above that of all other kings, a status bordering on divinity. Such a claim suits the character of Agamemnon whose *hubris*, it must be recalled, was at the very root of the conflict between himself and Achilles. In the very opening lines of the epic, Homer says:

What drove them to fight with such a fury?  
Apollo the son of Zeus and Leto. Incensed at the king  
He swept a fatal plague through the army – men were dying  
And all because Agamemnon spurned Apollo's priest. (1:9-12)

If Agamemnon's armour, crafted by human hands, hints at the likeness to divinity (and perhaps also the *hubris*) of its bearer, the divine origin of Achilles' new armour specifically serves to encase him in a sheathing of divinity. It is created with the specific intent of being "armour that any man in the world of men will marvel at through all the years to come – whoever sees its splendor." (18:544-546) It thereby all but guarantees the permanent glory of its bearer.

The structural relationship between the shield of Agamemnon and the shield of Achilles helps to reveal yet another function of the shield. The shield is also a medium for the transmission of a message intended (though not exclusively) for those faced with its advance. M.W. Edwards notes that in the *Iliad*:

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<sup>44</sup> The text of this description is included as Appendix C.



Often...a short form of a type-scene (or other structural pattern) precedes a fuller version, as if to familiarize the hearer with the concept before its most significant occurrence.<sup>45</sup>

Such is the case with the two shields in question, the former serving as an introduction to the latter. Thus the shield of Agamemnon is of the same type as the shield of Achilles and can be of considerable assistance in understanding how the latter works to produce its effects. The shield of Agamemnon echoes the shield of the goddess Athena and hence offers a significant clue as to how the shield of Achilles works. Athena had lent her mirrored shield to the hero Perseus to aid him in his quest to kill the Gorgon, Medusa. Medusa, once beautiful, had been cursed by Athena so that whomsoever looked upon her would be instantly turned to stone. Perseus was able to avoid her gaze, thanks to the reflective properties of the shield, and decapitate her. The hero then returned the shield and the severed head to Athena, who in turn affixed the terrifying visage upon the shield.<sup>46</sup>

Homer describes the shield Agamemnon carries as being decorated with “the Gorgon’s grim mask - the burning eyes, the stark, transfixing horror – and round her strode the shapes of Rout and Fear.” (11:39-40) The Gorgon’s head on his shield threatens to paralyze the viewer, to remove from him the possibility of resistance.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis* p.67.

<sup>46</sup> See Graves, *The Greek Myths*. Perseus and his strategic approach will be discussed in more detail in chapters II and IV.

<sup>47</sup> Of course, as with Hector’s claim to superiority over Achilles, Agamemnon’s message that resistance is impossible is not entirely true. The conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles is explicitly based on Achilles’ promise to the seer Calchas to defend him against the wrath of Agamemnon. (1:85-98) Were it the case that resistance to the authority of Agamemnon were as impossible as he claims, then whole of the epic

The production of fear and reverence (anticipating “shock and awe”) is intended both for enemies and subjects alike. This kind of psychological warfare is easily found in both historical and contemporary settings. As a later example, the Spartan hoplites were known to have their shields uniformly embossed with the single character  $\Lambda$  (lambda) for “Lacedemonia.” This sent a distinct message to their opponents and allies alike that the Spartans fought, moved, and were victorious as a single unit. This was extremely powerful within the context of phalanx based warfare. To face such a uniformed wall without the benefit of being part of one oneself must have been daunting indeed. This effect *on its own* contributes to the very efficiency and efficacy of which it bespeaks. An intimidated opponent is a more easily defeated opponent. Intimidation lends itself to panic and poor decisions on the part of the intimidated. The shield of Achilles works in much the same way.

Homer is quick to tell the reader that the shield of Achilles was a terrifying sight. Even the allies of Achilles could not look at it directly. Only Achilles himself was capable of this. Where others “shrank away,” the more Achilles looks, the deeper his anger goes, fearful not for his own life, but that the body of his lover Patroclus “may rot to nothing.”<sup>48</sup> It is clear that an important function of the shield is to enthrall its audience into inaction. Thus there is a genealogical relationship of sorts between the

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would be groundless. This is a critical point and will be addressed in much more detail, albeit in a slightly different context, later in the argument.

<sup>48</sup> Given more space, there is an opening here to examine the parallels between Patroclus as a symbol of the core values of friendship and other-connection and the present challenges to traditional notions of family, national pride and other “core values” as they are perceived by conservatives. Could it be that Bush too fears that these conservative “core values” may also “rot to nothing?”

paralyzing gaze of Medusa, the shield of Agamemnon, and the shield of Achilles. It does not perform this function in the expected way, as exemplified in the cold eyed stare of the Gorgon depicted on Agamemnon's shield. Yet its paralyzing effect is more powerful. How then does it enthrall?

The links between Medusa and the shields of Athena, Agamemnon, and Achilles indicate the importance of fear in their respective operations. Certainly each of them work, at least in part, by paralyzing their audience through fear. Yet at the same time there is more going on. The reader is introduced to the shield of Achilles as "a world of gorgeous immortal work." (18:564) Agamemnon's shield is introduced as "beautiful blazoned work." (11:35) Even Medusa herself was once very beautiful before being cursed by Athena.<sup>49</sup> Both beauty and fear are central in the operation of the shield. There is an immense and irresolvable tension between repulsion and attraction built into the shield. Homer captures this tension when he describes the shield as "gleaming bright as the light that reaches sailors out at sea." (19:443-444) Such a light may be a beacon, guiding the sailors home. But it may also be a warning, telling of treacherous waters and unsafe passage.

Graves notes that Athena affixes the Gorgon's head onto her shield

doubtless to warn people against examining the divine mysteries hidden behind it. Greek bakers used to paint Gorgon masks on their ovens, to discourage busybodies from opening the oven door, peeping in, and thus allowing a draught to spoil the bread.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Consider that after her death, Pegasus, the very symbol of beauty, is born from her corpse.

<sup>50</sup> Graves, *The Greek Myths* 129.

These descriptions, too, make note of an underlying tension between repulsion and attraction. Were Athena's shield and the mysteries hidden behind it not attractive, there would be no need for the warning visage. Were it not a matter of attractive curiosity as to what is happening in the unseen confines of the baker's oven, the doors would remain unadorned. To inquire into these mysteries, to seek to reveal that which is hidden is to disrupt their power and to destabilize their operation. If one wants to sustain the mysteries of the gods, they must remain unknowable. If one wants to make a loaf of bread, the oven door must remain closed. If one wants to represent a War on Terror as inevitable, all other options must remain closed. The power of the shield is the power to close off the other options.<sup>51</sup> The shield enthralls by suspending its audience between beauty and fear, between attraction and repulsion, between the known and the unknowable, between life and death. The shield by paralyzes by destroying hope.

### **Beauty, Hope and Fear**

The majority of Homer's description of the shield is taken up by events that take place away from the city at war. Homer dedicates relatively few lines to the description of war on the shield. Yet the intensity of the battle scenes cannot be denied. It is as if Homer is telling the reader, or that the shield is reminding the viewer, that the quieter life of abundance and the rule of law is the backdrop against which the sacrifices of war can make sense. Thus it would at first appear that war is but a relatively small part of a larger world. War can be seen as set against a backdrop of more civil, ordered modes or

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<sup>51</sup> And to disrupt that power is to allow for alternatives. The later chapters of the dissertation will discuss ways in which this power can be disrupted.



forms of living. For what soldier does not think of a return to the life he has left behind? This is very clear throughout Homer's epic. Note, for example, how quickly the Argives embrace Agamemnon's suggestion that they leave Troy (2:168-180). How else could Helen's mimicry of the voices of the wives of those hidden in the wooden horse be so compelling?<sup>52</sup> Or again, how else is it that the most intense fighting comes when the Achaean ships are threatened? For these ships are nothing if not an ever present and necessary reminder of the possibility of return to a peaceful life beyond the battlefield. It is this possibility, this promise of a better world that the shield (understood as a claim) takes away.

The overwhelming power of the shield, its paralyzing effect, is achieved in a manner as subtle as the artwork embossed upon it. Although the battle scenes are a small part of the overall picture, they bleed into everything. They absorb the background against which they appear. This takes place largely through the multiple parallels between the images on the shield and the lives led by its immediate audience, those faced with its advance on the battlefield. Some of these parallels are obvious. Clearly the language used by Homer in the description of the battle by the river could be taken from one of a thousand other places in the text of the *Iliad*. It is not difficult to see the fate of Hector in Homer's reference to "hauling a dead man through the slaughter by the heels" (18:630) This image bears a sense of the prophetic, but only in so far as the reader is already familiar with the outcome of the greater narrative. This "prophetic" character of the images on the shield become recognized as such only *de*

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<sup>52</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1996) 4:310.

*facto*. Retrospectively the events can be seen as fated, inevitable. Of course, Hector's corpse is not the only one to be accorded such treatment. Sarpedon, Patroclus and a host of others are subjected to such indignity within the epic. Thus this particular image on the shield both describes events that have happened and events that will happen. Indeed to the immediate audience, they are representations of events that *are happening*. This lends weight to the shield's claims to timelessness and to its acceptability as an accurate reflection of the world.

The images of the soldiers in battle are those that most closely and obviously mirror the experience of the shield's immediate audience. Trojans and Greeks alike see themselves reflected in those figures, which

clashed and fought like living, breathing men  
grappling each others corpses, dragging off the dead. (18:627-628)

These lines simultaneously describe the craftsmanship of Hephaestus and the existential state of the combatants themselves. Due to this proximity of image and experience, the combatants, like the reader, see the blurring of the lines between the representations on the shield and their own realities. The soldiers and the reader (the audience) are taken in by the mirroring effect of the shield, forgetting that these images are representations, not reflections, and most certainly not the "things themselves." The immediate audience of the shield, Greek and Trojan alike, are caught in the ambiguity of the lines quoted above. In these lines, in this image, the viewers of the shield are told that they are already dead; that they are only "*like* living, breathing men" even as they appear – even to themselves – to live and breathe as men.

The obvious parallels are powerful, but they are far from exhaustive. Nor for that matter are they necessarily the most powerful inducers of paralysis on the shield.



The direct parallels may suggest the impossibility of any combatant making it out alive, but they do nothing to disturb the backdrop of a peaceful life for the sake of which a continual, if ultimately fatal, struggle might make sense. That is, the unavoidability of death underscored by the obvious parallels between the images on the shield and the existential condition of its immediate audience does nothing in itself to remove the motivation to struggle on.<sup>53</sup> It is precisely this motivation that is eroded, and even erased by the subtler mirroring to be found on the shield.

Take, for example 18:676-685, which reads:

...- a savage roar! –  
a crashing attack – and a pair of ramping lions  
had seized a bull from the cattle's front ranks –  
he bellowed out as they dragged him off in agony.  
Packs of dogs and the young herdsmen rushed to help  
But the lions ripping open the hide of the huge bull  
were gulping down the guts and the black pooling blood  
while the herdsmen yelled the fast pack on – no use.  
The hounds shrank from sinking teeth in the lions,  
They balked, hunching close, barking, cringing away.

Compare this image on the shield to the description of a Trojan assault in Book 15:

Routed like herds of cattle or big flocks of sheep  
When two wild beasts stampeded them away in terror,  
Suddenly pouncing down in their midst (15:382-384)

Or again compare these lines to 17:69-75:

Menelaus fierce as a mountain lion sure of his power,  
Seizing the choicest head from a good grazing herd.  
First he cracks its neck, clamped in its huge jaws,  
Mauling the kill then down in gulps he bolts it,

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<sup>53</sup> One could argue that on the contrary it is precisely the inevitability of death that renders possible the ethical code by which the Homeric heroes operate. Glory is to be found in the accomplishments of one's life and the way in which one chooses to face an unavoidable death. See Graham Zanker, *The Heart of Achilles: Characterization and Personal Ethics in the Iliad* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997).

Blood and guts, and around him dogs and shepherds  
Raise a fierce din but they keep their distance,  
Lacking nerve to go in and take the lion on –  
The fear that grips their spirit makes them blanch.

Although nearly identical language is used to describe these events, the events themselves belong in the two opposing worlds of peace and war. With these passages one can begin to discern the erosion of the boundaries between the two worlds. But this is not all. Another of the more pacific scenes on the shield depicts:

...a thriving vineyard loaded with clusters,  
bunches of lustrous grapes in gold, ripening deep purple  
and climbing vines shot up on silver vine-poles.  
And round it he cut a ditch in dark blue enamel  
And round the ditch he staked a fence in tin.  
And one lone footpath led toward the vineyard  
and down it the pickers ran  
whenever they went to strip the grapes at vintage –  
girls and boys, their hearts leaping in innocence,  
bearing away the sweet ripe fruit in wicker baskets. (18:654.663)

The images here bear a strong resemblance to the physical layout of the Achaean camp, surrounded by a trench filled with sharp stakes and accessible by a single gate. (12:65-79) It is not overly difficult to see the similarities between the youths bearing away the vintage they have “stripped” and the Trojan soldiers carrying away the spoils they have stripped from the dead Argives within the gates of the encampment. (15:409) With only a small amount of visual imagination, one can quite easily see the similarities between the baskets dripping with the dark juice of the grapes, and the spoils of the encampment, dripping with the dark blood of the Achaeans.

The similarities in this image work by placing the combatants in the dual role of both harvester and harvested. This is significant when one considers the number of agricultural scenes depicted on the shield of Achilles. Elsewhere Homer compares the

sound of battle to the thud of a timber cutter's axe when clearing a forest. (15:736) The work of war and the work of peace are equated. They are made interchangeable. Thus within the context of the message of the shield, the reach of war extends that much further.

There is one particular scene on the shield that seems most removed from the bloody grind and feverish activity of the battlefield:

And the famous crippled Smith forged a meadow  
deep in a shaded glen for shimmering flocks to graze,  
with shepherds' steadings, well roofed huts and sheepfolds. (18:686-688)

This scene is quintessentially pastoral. Quiet and still, it seems almost an antipode to the battle scenes. And yet one can find echoes of the imagery of this scene in the most pitched, most heated moments of the war. After the death of Sarpedon when both armies are in a desperate struggle to claim his corpse, Homer says:

But they still kept swarming round and round the corpse  
Like flies in a sheepfold buzzing over the brimming pails  
In the first spring days when the buckets flood with milk.  
So veteran troops kept swarming around that corpse,  
Never pausing - (17:745-749)

Echoes of war are to be found even in the tranquility of the "deep shaded glen." The message conveyed is that the reach of war is universal, its presence ubiquitous.

### **Sarpedon's Body**

The description of the death of Sarpedon contains within it one of the key images that work to confirm the universality of war, and the ensuing battle for his corpse is instructive in another way. Immediately prior to the passage quoted above Homer says:

Not even a hawk-eyed scout could still make out Sarpedon,  
The man's magnificent body covered over head to toe,  
Buried under a mass of weapons, blood and dust. (17:742-744)

This is significant in that the ostensible rationale for the ongoing fight at that time and at that place is the recovery of Sarpedon's body either to gain glory by stripping it of its armour, or else to save it from such a fate. Yet the object of the struggle, the purpose for which it is waged becomes obscured by the struggle itself. This is true both in a literal sense in that the body is hidden from sight, and true on a grander scale in that it is during this fight that Patroclus is killed by Hector. Sarpedon's body as a *causus belli* is lost, just as are all such causes for war, and the fighting ultimately continues for its own sake.

It is in this realization that the shield at last displays its most terrifying power. Its claim "thus it is" carries with it the full weight of the realization that there is no quiet life to return to, there is no greater cause that makes the continuing struggle meaningful. The claim of the shield is that there is no cause for war at all, only war for the sake of its own perpetuation. Each and every one of the participants is already dead, and only "like living, breathing men." (18:627) The potency of the claim made by the shield, the veracity of its "thus it is" and its effectiveness as a tool of war depends on the constant recreation of the context within which its claim is true. The shield presents its audience with an apparently inescapable and foregone conclusion that a life of peace "is not for you." The combatant, the audience, is always irretrievably cut off from that other world to which the soldier hopes to return. Ironically enough, the shield achieves this by presenting the worlds of war and peace as distinct entities.



Such a presentation resonates with a preexisting framework of experience on the part of its audience. Every soldier faced with the advancing shield has distinct memories of a life before the war, and harbors hopes of a return to a life after the war. As the war drags on, these memories fade and these hopes diminish. It is likely that had Thetis given the shield to Achilles upon his departure for Troy, the claim thereon would have had less of an impact. The memory of the world of peace would still have been too fresh in the minds and hearts of the audience (the adversary) to be so radically excluded. Ten years on the same conclusion has come to bear significant weight. It has become utterly believable and thus utterly effective. In a way the shield works to alter the realities of its audience and its bearer alike. It takes what is obviously true – that war and peace are distinct; that a peaceful world does precede and will follow on the intermittent and limited eruption of war - and turns it into an illusion. It supplants that “reality” with its own claim to “reality.” Speaking anachronistically, the shield accomplishes something of a Copernican revolution. The empirical evidence remains the same, but its meaning is radically altered. Again, as with the claims of both Hector and Agamemnon, the making of a claim is not the same thing as the truth of the claim. The shield may make a powerful “thus it is” claim, but this does not in itself make the claim true. However there are features of this claim that do work to recreate the conditions within which it is true, or rather becomes true. To simply state, “thus it is” does not make it so. Yet if this claim is believed to be true and acted upon as if it were true, it does, after a time, become true. The claim, which presents itself as a reflection of the world, can and does work to shape the world in its own image.



An example of this can be found in a discussion of the function of the paralysis induced by the shield. What exactly is meant by “paralysis” in this context? Clearly this paralysis is not literal in the same way as the Gorgon’s stare causes paralysis. Although the sight of the shield does not turn its audience into stone, its “blazoned glory” (19:16) does induce a momentary pause. It is, quite literally *stunning* in its “well-wrought beauty.” (19:23) This stunning takes place on both an experiential and existential level, as has already been discussed. It is in this moment of disorientation and despair that the audience (the enemy soldier) is most vulnerable. It is in this moment of inaction that the bearer’s spear finds its mark. It is during this brief paralysis that the sword falls. The net result is that the momentary pause becomes the permanent paralysis of death. The claim of the shield thereby generates empirical evidence (in the form of a corpse) to back itself. It is critical to note that this piling of corpses upon corpses – for the shield must constantly recreate the conditions of its own veracity – does not serve to hasten the end of the war, but to perpetuate it. When Achilles reenters the battle, shield in hand, he is not interested in winning the war, thereby bringing it to a close so that he might return to a life of peace. He is fully aware that such a life is, truly, not for him. Having been told by his father’s horse, Roan Beauty, that his death is immanent:

Achilles burst out in anger,  
“Why, Roan Beauty -why prophesy my doom?  
Don’t waste your breath. I know, well I know –  
I am destined to die here, far from my dear father,  
far from mother. But all the same I will never stop  
till I drive the Trojans o their bloody fill of war!” (19:496-501)

Rather than desiring an end to the fighting, Achilles says:

-what I really crave

is slaughter and blood and the choking groans of men! (19:254-255)

In other words, Achilles is not interested in bringing the war to an end but in its perpetuation

### **The Shield of George W. Bush**

The Shield of Achilles produces paralysis in its audience by the subtle manipulation of fear. There are elements of what might be called "shock and awe," but the greatest share of its power is achieved more insidiously. It is frightful because it presents a divinely sanctioned worldview in which there is no place for hope. The same can be said of the rhetoric surrounding the War on Terror. It is obviously ridiculous to suggest that President Bush goes around ducking behind an enormous golden artifact from the ancient world. Nonetheless it can still be said that he carries the shield of Achilles if he is seen as making the same kind of claim as is embodied by the shield. Just as the shield purports to reflect a world of perpetual warfare in which the struggle to keep hope alive is that which makes its absence more palpable, so too do President Bush's speeches render conflict inescapable, hope impossible and resistance to his particular plan of action futile. In short, both Achilles and George W. Bush move forward behind the divinely sanctioned claim "thus it is."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> This is not to say that it is only these two parties that advance behind the shield. It would not be difficult to demonstrate that the same sorts of claims are made by Bin Laden and representatives of Al Qaeda. Indeed these types of claims are very widespread, but no less problematic for it.

Evidence for this is not at all difficult to find. Almost any speech by a Bush administration official on the topic of the War on Terror is replete with examples.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> For a brief sample of these speeches, taken from Secretary and Undersecretary of Defence, see Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Beyond Nation Building* (2003 [cited April 12 2004]); available from <http://www.dod.gov/speeches/2003/sp20030214-secdef0024.html>, Donald H. Rumsfeld, *A New Kind of War* (2001 [cited]); available from <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2001/s20010927-secdef.html>, Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Remarks to the Heritage Foundation* (2004 [cited]); available from <http://www.dod.gov/speeches/2004/sp20040517-secdef0422.html>, Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Secretary Rumsfeld Remarks at the International Institute for Strategic Studies* (2004 [cited 06/07 2004]); available from <http://www.dod.gov/transcripts/2004/tr20040605-secdef0816.html>, Paul Wolfowitz, *America's New Allies in the War on Terrorism* (U.S. Dept. of Defense, 2004 [cited December 5 2004]); available from <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2004/sp20040709-depsecdef0561.html>, Paul Wolfowitz, *"Bridging the Dangerous Gap between the West and the Muslim World"* (2002 [cited June 1 2004]); available from <http://www.dod.gov/speeches/2002/s20020503-depsecdef.html>, Paul Wolfowitz, *"Building a Better World: One Path from Crisis to Opportunity"* (2002 [cited June 1 2004]); available from <http://www.dod.gov/speeches/2002/s20020905-depsecdef.html>, Paul Wolfowitz, *Building the Bridge to a More Peaceful Future* (2002 [cited June 1 2004]); available from <http://www.dod.gov/speeches/2002/s20021206-depsecdef.html>, Paul Wolfowitz, *The Gathering Storm: The Threat of Global Terror and Asia/Pacific Security* (2002 [cited June 1 2004]); available from <http://www.dod.gov/speeches/2002/s20020601-depsecdef.html>, Paul Wolfowitz, *Georgetown Iden Lecture: "Winning the Battle of Ideas: Another Front in the War on Terror"* (2003 [cited June 1 2004]); available from <http://www.dod.gov/speeches/2003/sp20031030-depsecdef0642.html>, Paul Wolfowitz, *A Strategic Approach to the Challenge of Terrorism* (U.S. Department of Defense, 2004 [cited September 16 2004]); available from <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2004/sp20040908-depsecdef0721.html>. The President himself also provides numerous examples, including George W Bush, *Inaugural Address* (2005 [cited February 2 2005]); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/print/20050120-1.html>, George W Bush, *President Bush Addresses United Nations General Assembly, September 23, 2003* (2003 [cited December 15 2004]); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/09/print/20030923-4.html>, George W Bush, *President Bush Speaks to United Nations* (2001 [cited December 15 2004]); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011110-3.html>, George W Bush, *State of the Union Address* (2003 [cited December 15 2004]); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html>, George W Bush, *State of the Union Address* (2002 [cited December 15 2004]); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>, George W Bush, *Transcript from Bush Speech on American Strategy in Iraq* (2004



One early and thematically archetypical example is President Bush's address to a joint session of the congress delivered only nine days after the fall of the World Trade Centre Towers and the burning of the Pentagon. The speech was given within context in which there was a profound sense that the world had changed, that nothing would ever be the same again:

In the normal course of events, Presidents come to this chamber to report on the state of the Union. Tonight, no such report is needed. It has already been delivered by the American people.<sup>56</sup>

From the outset there is a clear demarcation between competing worlds, one normal, one not. The opening lines of the speech both recognize the exceptional circumstances in which they are delivered and subsume the exception with the parameters of an accepted and established tradition. This modified State of the Union address proceeds to offer a portrayal of the current condition as replete with cooperative and coordinated action, compassion, piety and orderliness. There is no overt mention in these early lines of the chaos and confusion against which these manifestations appear. Here, even in the most dire of circumstances the American union is orderly, structured, and adherent to the rule of law. It is notable that in re-establishing the hegemony of the normal, the usual roles of leader and led are reversed. It is not the President who reports on the state of the Union, but the people themselves. In this way, the role of the people as the primary locus of authority is highlighted. This is not unexpected in a liberal democratic state, and is in fact a restatement of the core feature of such a state. The audience is

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[cited May 24 2004]); available from [www.nytimes.com/2004/05/24/politics/25PTX-FULL.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/24/politics/25PTX-FULL.html).

<sup>56</sup> Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, 20 September, 2001 ([cited]., 2.

subtly reassured that political power, of which America is the greatest contemporary example, is in their hands.

More than this, President Bush's reference to "the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers"<sup>57</sup> presents a series of symbolic images all indicating a sense of belonging to and partaking in a life beyond the self. Each of these actions may be highlighted as especially significant in a time of crisis, but the symbolic and material infrastructures upon which they depend are not themselves reflex responses to crisis. For these acts to be meaningful, the symbolic frameworks within which they are meaningful must already be in place. That is, the unfurling of a flag in a time of crisis relies upon an already existing sense of political unity. The lighting of candles obtains its symbolic power from a pre-existing framework of memorial practices. The giving of blood and the saying of prayers require an already existing means of doing so through hospitals and churches. None of the gestures are selfish. All are other directed, selfless. Each of these gestures, in other words, is indicative of a selflessness that was already institutionalized prior to the crisis in which such gestures are highlighted. They are indicative of "the decency of a loving and giving people who have made the grief of strangers their own."<sup>58</sup> It is not that the September 11 attacks have made us this way. It is who we were already. More than once, and in no uncertain terms, the audience is reminded that this is the "city at peace."

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 4.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 4.



The images of orderliness and compassion are extended beyond the boundaries of a single country. Indeed the reflections on the similarly orderly responses offered in various locations and settings around the globe – lawmakers singing on the Capitol steps;<sup>59</sup> the American national anthem playing in London, Paris and Berlin;<sup>60</sup> prayer services outside the embassy in South Korea and inside a mosque in Cairo;<sup>61</sup> moments of silence in Australia and Latin America<sup>62</sup> – all tend to indicate the presence of a greater “civilized” world. The formula (if treated as such) can be stated as:

International Community = Civilization = America<sup>63</sup>

This greater *polis*, like that portrayed on the shield of Achilles, is both concerned with and representative of justice. This is made abundantly clear in the statement “whether we bring our enemies to justice, or justice to our enemies, justice will be done.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.([cited]), 7.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.([cited]), 9.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.([cited]), 10.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.([cited]).

<sup>63</sup> One effect of this formula is to reassert the continued viability of American hegemony which had been so recently shaken by the profound sense of helplessness and uncertainty that followed the September 11 attacks.

<sup>64</sup> Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, 20 September, 2001 ([cited]), 10. There is a discrepancy between the transcript of the speech and the audio record of it. The quote is taken from the transcript, but in the audio record the President says “whether we bring our enemies to justice, or *injustice* to our enemies, justice will be done.” This slip of the tongue, if it is one, is instructive because when stated this way, the President implies an adherence to a Hammurabic code of justice; an eye for an eye, a life for a life, injustice repaid by injustice. Given his consistency in adhering to a “fight fire with fire” response to the attacks, this may not be far off the mark.

Against this enlarged “city of peace” there is a corresponding “city at war.” The shift from the “city at peace” to the “city at war” comes with the declaration: “On September 11, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country.”<sup>65</sup> This “city at war” is characterized by a complete lack of compassion, an inability, or worse, an unwillingness to recognize and respect the rule of law. Evidence for this is indicated by the institutionalized lack of a distinction between civilian and combatant. Just as in Homer’s description of the shield, it is here that the most blatant images of terror are to be found.

The terrorists’ directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans, and make no distinction among military and civilians, including women and children.<sup>66</sup>

Immediately, there are clear lines established: freedom versus enslavement, justice versus cruelty, rationalism versus radicalism, civilization versus barbarity, good versus evil. It is true that much of the gore to be found in Homer’s account of the city at war is absent, but no less shocking to the contemporary audience – and perhaps more so – is the revelation that “you can be jailed for owning a television. Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate. A man can be jailed in Afghanistan if his beard is not long enough.”<sup>67</sup> There is a double move in Bush’s litany of abuses to be found in Taliban

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 12. The declaration begins the description of “city at war,” but also establishes a framework within which the attacks can make sense – as acts of war. The confusion as to how to respond is reduced, since “Americans have known wars.” This patterning of responses is a common semiotic theme of the speech, and more will be said of it below.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 15.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 18.

controlled Afghanistan. He provides a glimpse into a particular legal code, a particular social order, yet his purpose is to expose it as pure disorder. Murder and the arbitrary display of power is the only “rule” here. Just as the “the citizens of 80 other nations who died with our own”<sup>68</sup> are united in a single event, so too are “thousands of these terrorists in more than 60 countries”<sup>69</sup> united by a single unified purpose; to hasten the downfall of civilization itself. The sides are clearly demarcated. There is no room for any other consideration. The choice, if it can be considered that, is stark: “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”<sup>70</sup>

Bush’s speech, much like the shield of Achilles, presents itself as an accurate reflection of the world. There is nothing particularly surprising in his demarcation of a line between peace and war. Such a distinction is obvious from a common sense perspective. Yet by marking this distinction, he establishes a framework within which the attacks can be nothing else but acts of war. In doing so, he also establishes the parameters of an appropriate response. He says at one point “by sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions – by abandoning every value except the will to power –

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 11.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 16.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 30. The corresponding “identity formula”(see above) is less apparent in this early speech by President Bush than it is in the work of Frum and Perle, where it is effectively stated as “Islam = Radical Fundamentalist Islam = Chaos.” See Frum and Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*. Of course to choose to be “with us” means to “choose” to take part in a global, all out war against those who have chosen to fight a global, all out war.

they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism.”<sup>71</sup> By directly equating the terrorists with fascists, Nazis and Communists, the President is translating the threat of militant Islam into a symbolic, *mythological* language that bears considerable weight for those portions of the population who lived through the later half of the last century. Not only is he representing this threat in terms that can be easily understood, he is also implying an already patterned response to that threat.<sup>72</sup> If militant Islam is Nazism and Communism, it should be fought in the same way, namely wholeheartedly, in all places, at all times, with all necessary sacrifices:

Americans are asking: How will we fight and win this war? We will direct every resource at our command -- every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network.<sup>73</sup>

Thus the struggle against terrorism becomes just another episode in a perpetual war between “freedom and fear.”<sup>74</sup> Within this formula, one cannot “come to terms” with

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<sup>71</sup> Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, 20 September, 2001 ([cited].), 27.

<sup>72</sup> See Cyril Buffet and Beatrice Heuser, eds., *Haunted by History: Myths in International Relations* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1998). For another discussion of this rhetorical technique see Maja Zehfuss, “Writing War, against Good Conscience,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 1 (2004).

<sup>73</sup> Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, 20 September, 2001 ([cited].), 28. Note that there is an ambiguity in the language here. While obviously true that some Americans are asking this question, this is also a suggested definition of what it means to be an American. By this interpretation, if you are not asking this question, and therefore if you have not accepted the framework that dictates the events of September 11 as acts of war, you are un-American.

<sup>74</sup> There are affinities between this effect and Philip Bobbitt’s argument. (See Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles War, Peace, and the Course of History*.) His title selection seems odd for a book in which Homer scarcely appears in the index, but if the argument of this



the enemy. One can only destroy the enemy outright. "The only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows."<sup>75</sup>

The shield of Achilles accomplishes something of a Copernican revolution. It presents its audience with familiar observations, but radically alters the meaning of those observations. Although President Bush's speech makes repeated reference to "the values of America" and repeatedly reinforces the priority of peace over war, the measures he proposes in the speech work to invert that relationship and to redefine those values. In specific terms, Bush speaks of "our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other."<sup>76</sup> The operational term is "freedom." As his opening lines imply this freedom resides in the fact that each individual is the primary locus of power. That is political power is not centralized in the institutional hierarchies of government officials, but resides in the people themselves. It is notable that in the name of defending this freedom, President Bush proposes a centralization of power by creating an Office of Homeland Security. In the name of securing freedom, his policies, which he deems "essential,"<sup>77</sup> are more

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paper is correct, (that the message of the shield is the inevitability of war), it is not an accidental choice. I would disagree that Al Qaeda is best understood as a "virtual state" (that is to say "as good as a state") as this leads to the perpetuation of a state-centric model within which one epochal war must follow another. Bobbitt too is trapped by his own mirrorings.

<sup>75</sup> Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, 20 September, 2001 ([cited]., 33.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.([cited]., 24.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.([cited]., 33.



appropriate to the establishment and operation of a police state. In the name of securing freedom he proposes “to give law enforcement the additional tools it needs,”<sup>78</sup> “to dramatically expand the number of air marshals on domestic flights,”<sup>79</sup> to “strengthen our intelligence capabilities”<sup>80</sup> so that - hopefully – “in the months and years ahead, life will return to almost normal.”<sup>81</sup>

If “remaking the world – and imposing [their] radical beliefs on people everywhere”<sup>82</sup> is a goal of Al Qaeda and its supporters, then President Bush appears to be conceding at least partial defeat. If a return to life that is “almost normal” is at best – “hopefully” – years away, then the terrorists have indeed remade the world. “All of this was brought upon us in a single day – and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack.”<sup>83</sup> And yet there are strong indications in the speech that the world has not changed, only our awareness of it has. In describing America as “a country awakened to danger,” the President implies two things. First, he points to the presence of danger in the world well before the September 11 attacks. Second, he

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 47.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 46.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 47. One begins to suspect that the “we” referred to in this passage is not the same as the “we” that hold the freedoms enumerated earlier. If the latter “we” refers to the people as a whole, the former appears to refer more to the institutions of a government over and above the people.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 52.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 14.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.([cited)., 12.

implies that America's security in its freedoms was an illusion. More precisely its sense of "normal" was a *daydream*. In his statement, "normal" is rendered illusory. In so far as the "city at peace" is representative of that normalcy, he inverts the priority of peace over war. From now on, we are awake to the fact that war is the norm, just as it will be for the foreseeable future, *and just as it always has been*. This is indeed one of the key functions of the shield; to perpetuate the war it depicts as perpetual. In the end, the bearing of the shield itself creates the world it purports only to represent.

In the discussion of Homer's epic, the body of Sarpedon was said to represent an ever self-perpetuating *causus belli*. Although beyond the parameters of the September 20 speech, a similar loss of the *causus belli* can be seen in the execution of the War on Terror.<sup>84</sup> Active American involvement in the war began in Afghanistan and was a retaliatory strike in response to the September 11 attacks. The purpose was to destroy Al Qaeda training camps known to be there. This cause for war overlapped with the stated aim of liberating the Afghani people – most especially its women – from the oppression of Taliban rule. In January of 2002, the scope of the war widened with the identification of the so-called "axis of evil."<sup>85</sup> As the focus shifted to weapons of mass destruction, multiple and ever broader causes for war became apparent. Just as the cause of the fight shifts in Homer's epic from the recovery of Sarpedon's body to the recovery of Patroclus' body, to Achilles raw craving for "slaughter and blood and the

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<sup>84</sup> Although a detailed analysis of this phenomenon would certainly prove fruitful, it is beyond the scope of the present paper. For the time being a few salient points will have to suffice.

<sup>85</sup> Bush, *State of the Union Address* ([cited]).

choking groans of men” (19:254-255), the cause for the War on Terror shifts from the September 11 attacks to the liberation of oppressed peoples,<sup>86</sup> to the halting of the spread of weapons of mass destruction, to the mere presence of evil in the world.<sup>87</sup> As the cause for the war becomes more abstract, its scope increases. With a stated aim of the eradication of evil itself, the war becomes an existential feature of the world. Just as in the image on Achilles’ shield, there is no option but perpetual, universal warfare. If there remains any doubt on this point, Bush forthrightly announces it in his speech of September 20, 2001: “Americans [read the civilized world] should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign unlike any we have ever seen.”<sup>88</sup> Even the appearance of peace is no indication of its existence because the possibility of ongoing “covert operations, secret even in success” cannot be ruled out.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the ubiquity of this war is made quite clear by observing that Bush is speaking as commander-in-chief when he says, “I ask you to live your lives, and hug your children.”<sup>90</sup> Even the mundane becomes the action of a dutiful soldier. In the same breath as he condemns the enemy for a lack of regard for the civilian/combatant distinction, he eradicates the same boundary. “Like flies in a sheepfold” indeed.

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<sup>86</sup> As has been the case, to date, in both Afghanistan and Iraq, with an eye to North Korea, Iran, Syria, and possibly Saudi Arabia.

<sup>87</sup> For a detailed discussion of the war in such terms see Frum and Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*.

<sup>88</sup> Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, 20 September, 2001* ([cited]., 30.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.([cited]., 30.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.([cited]., 38.

### **Achilles and Priam: Setting aside the Shield**

The shield of Achilles and the rhetoric of the Bush administration differ in at least one key aspect. One of Homer's central points, as is readily discernable in the depictions on the shield, is to mark the similarities between the combatants. They are not radically different, but rather nigh unto undifferentiated. The Greeks under Agamemnon and the Trojans under Priam worship the same gods, speak the same language, and hold the same standards of proper conduct. In the narrative, it is easy to become lost in a blur of names of the dead of both armies. The dead are simultaneously marked as different and subsumed as a mere fraction of an increasing mass of corpses. All different, all the same. It is on this point that one of the main differences between the Homeric myth and the War on Terror is to be found.

The Bush administration and the neoconservatives around it have gone to great lengths to mark clear and untransgressable boundaries between "us" and "them," the (good) "citizen" and the (evil) "terrorist." The effort to mark the distinctions between combatants as absolute and diametrically opposed has the effect and express intent of rendering any reconciliation impossible. It is obvious that given an adversary who is not subject to the jurisdiction of logic or diplomacy, an adversary who cannot be appeased, then the only remaining option (and because of it, no option at all) is to fight.



Given that “they” are not even beholden to the rules of a “fair fight,” one has no choice but to bend those rules in return.<sup>91</sup>

Achilles provides a good example of this when re-enters the fight newly rearmed. In his bloodlust he willfully abandons the conventions of what might be called “civilized” behavior. The death of Patroclus changes Achilles for the worse. Patroclus is the beloved of Achilles. He is that which is valued above all, even above Achilles’ own life. Ironically the return to combat, motivated by the cherished value of friendship and close human connection, reveals the animalistic aspects of Achilles’ character. He is angrier, more likely to kill a defeated enemy,<sup>92</sup> less likely to recognize and respect the bounds of honor and civility,<sup>93</sup> more prone to *hubris*.<sup>94</sup>

Achilles is magnanimous in his suffering. He spreads his suffering out to make it universal. A comparison can be made to a common theme of the Bush administration’s rhetoric, encapsulated in Paul Wolfowitz’s statement that “the way to defeat extremism is to demonstrate that the values we call Western are indeed

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<sup>91</sup> It is for this reason that the Iraqi prisoner abuse scandal should not come as a real surprise. It is the same with revelations that the legal council for the Bush Administration has been implicated in giving the green light to the use of torture.

<sup>92</sup> See Achilles’ treatment of Lycaon. (21:38-155) Lycaon, a son of Priam, had been captured “in Priam’s well fenced orchard” by Achilles twelve days before, then ransomed back to his family. As Lycaon grasps Achilles knees, begging for mercy, he is run through and killed. His death is strikingly similar to that of Leodes in the *Odyssey*. Homer, *The Odyssey* 22:324-45.

<sup>93</sup> This is particularly evident in his treatment of the corpse of Hector. (22:465-476)

<sup>94</sup> One of the most notable examples is his open combat with Scamander, the river god. (21:240-320)



universal.”<sup>95</sup> The logic employed by Achilles, and implied by Wolfowitz, is that “if I must suffer, so shall you all.” Certainly this suffering and these values are not universal until they are made so in the press of battle, by the application of force.

The one whom Achilles makes suffer the most is Priam, Hector’s father. If Achilles’ treatment of Hector’s body marks his furthest foray from his own humanity, it is also the precondition of his return to it. The encounter between Achilles and Priam has been noted repeatedly as the moment when Achilles returns to the fold of humanity.<sup>96</sup> In this encounter two enemies recognize themselves in each other and are united by a common bond of suffering and loss. This leads in turn to a further forging of mutual respect when Achilles is convinced to return the body of Hector, and to offer Priam safe passage out of the Greek encampment. Achilles comes once again to recognize his place as one human being among many. The hubris he had displayed in his combat with the river god Scamander is wiped clean in the restraint he shows in not killing Priam.

This case of recognition and respect for a divine order is important. Achilles is farthest removed from his own humanity when he returns to battle armed with the

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<sup>95</sup> Wolfowitz, *Building a Better World: One Path from Crisis to Opportunity* ([cited]. As in President Bush’s speech of September 20, 2001, Wolfowitz does not spell out exactly what these values are. This gives him a certain flexibility in his proscriptions. The logic of spreading suffering, of responding to force with force, may be guided by a sense of (Hammurabic) justice, or by a kind of egalitarianism. It may even be guided by a variation of the so-called “Golden Rule.” (“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”) The variation coming in the doing unto others *as they have already demonstrated* they would have done unto themselves. Thus by causing suffering, the terrorists wish to be made to suffer.

<sup>96</sup> See Mark W Edwards, ed., *The Illiad: A Commentary*, vol. 5: books 17-20 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

shield. The claim of that shield is that war is omnipresent and perpetual. To challenge that claim, even by defending one's self when one is already only "like living breathing men," is an act of hubris. It is to directly contradict the voice of the gods. Yet Achilles himself challenges that claim by making peace with Priam. There is no small irony in this. His rage unleashed, Achilles is guilty of hubris, as evidenced by his combat with Scamander, (21:264-434) and by the outrage of the Olympian gods at his actions. (24:25-60) His rage in check and his humanity regained, he is also guilty of hubris as he exposes the gods as liars.<sup>97</sup> His peace with Priam is a direct rejection of the divinely sanctioned "thus it is" of the shield. His actions prove that there is more to life than killing. There is a broader suggestion in the truce forged between the king and the warrior that war can come to an end. Figuratively, the reconciliation flows from and displays the eternal possibility that any universal claim of the type "thus it is" can be mistaken. He puts an end to war, even if temporarily, thereby making the counter claim "thus is isn't," effectively placing the authority of his will above that of the gods. The deeper irony is that he achieves this only by recognizing the authority of the gods.

Achilles does this in two stages. The first recognition is more a matter of course than conviction. Having been instructed by the gods to return Hector's body:

The swift runner replied *in haste*, "So be it.  
The man who brings the ransom can take away the body.  
If Olympian Zeus himself insists in all earnest." (24:168-170)<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> This means he has also exposed himself as a liar. In making the shield, the gods make a "thus it is" claim, the specific content of which is "all is war." In bearing the shield, Achilles makes the same claim. His reconciliation with Priam however puts an end to war, even if only temporarily, thus exposing both himself as a bearer of the shield and the gods as guarantors of its "thus it is," as liars.

<sup>98</sup> Emphasis added.

This recognition of divine authority can be seen as bearing the hallmarks of hubris. Specifically, the conditional aspect of the remark suggests that if it were not the case that “Zeus himself insists in all earnest,” then the act would not be done. Such a conditional agreement is more to be expected in a negotiation between equals than in an exchange between god and man. In making these remarks Achilles places himself on par with the king of the gods. He remains therefore in a precarious position, trapped by his own arrogance.

The second stage comes later, and in a much quieter, more thoughtful way. In the presence of Priam, Hector’s father, Achilles is reminded of his own father. As Priam begs for the return of his son’s corpse, Achilles warns him:

Don’t stir my raging heart still more.  
Or under my own roof I may not spare your life, old man –  
Suppliant that you are – may break the laws of Zeus! (24:667-669)

And again, having agreed to return Hector’s body to Priam, Achilles does not permit Priam to see his son before the body is washed, for:

He feared that, overwhelmed by the sight of Hector,  
Wild with grief, Priam might let his anger flare  
And Achilles might fly into a fresh rage himself,  
Cut the old man down and break the laws of Zeus. (24:684-687)<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> It may also be argued that by the time Achilles reconciles with Priam he has already exacted his revenge by killing Hector, hence exhausting his propensity for hubris. In this case he would be best understood as exhibiting exhaustion rather than restraint. The quotes just offered speak against such an interpretation. So too does the fact that even after the death of Hector and the funeral of Patroclus, Achilles “kept on raging, shaming noble Hector.” (24:25) Even Apollo notes that “his temper can never bend and change.” (24:48) It is not altogether surprising that twelve days would not be enough to exhaust Achilles’ anger and pride, given that it has not been exhausted, but rather increased, from the very opening line of the poem as a whole.

Here, Achilles is fully aware of his tenuous grip on his own anger and because of this he is better able to control it. This recognition of the laws of Zeus is not an off the cuff, automatic reply delivered in a heated mood. In the second instance, where Homer makes the reader privy to the private thoughts of Achilles, it is clear that this is a genuine recognition of those laws. There is a sincerity and palpability to his deference to those divine laws. It is this second stage that frees Achilles from the precarious heights of arrogance and hubris. But this is not to say that Achilles has found his footing in a place *beneath* the gods.

Zeus does not stay the hand of Achilles from killing Priam. Rather Achilles restrains *himself*. It is up to him to follow the will of the gods or not. It should be noted that Achilles is fully aware of his own fate and that his death must closely follow that of Hector. He cannot therefore seek to avoid offending Zeus for fear of his own life. To give deference to the divine for the sake of one's own skin may be prudent, but it is not honorable. By not killing Priam, Achilles adheres to the dictates of a divine order out of a sheer sense of unambiguous honor (*tîmê*). He does not spare Priam in order to save his own life, but because it is what he believes is the right thing to do. This display of *tîmê* in turn renders the immortality of Achilles possible. It is what makes him a hero. Simply by having this choice, to follow the laws of the gods or not, he is not, strictly speaking, *bound* by the laws of the gods. Put differently, he is not a participant in the cosmological/ethical matrix of "thus it is" and "there is nothing to be done." It is more appropriate to say that this matrix is a tool useful in the furthering of his own will: a will that is equal to or greater than the will of the gods. Thus in gaining control of his anger,



and restraining his animalistic instincts he elevates himself above the station of the gods and simultaneously terminates his *hubris*.

This conclusion appears to be borne out by Homer himself as the scene immediately following what I have called the second stage recognition describes a meal shared by Priam and Achilles. Two points make this notable. First, Achilles suggests that Priam dine with him by retelling the tale of Niobe, a woman punished for her hubris.<sup>100</sup> This certainly brings the subject of hubris to the foreground of the audience's (reader's) attention. Second, the description of the meal itself is notably devoid of the usual offerings of the first cuts of meat as a sacrifice to the gods. In other parts of the epic, such an omission is a near certain way to garner the wrath of the gods. Here, however, the context is such that the gods are assuaged.

Achilles' reconciliation with Priam, his laying aside of the shield, not only saves the life of Priam and the dignity of Hector, but elevates the station of Achilles above that of the gods. He outstrips the power of the gods by recognizing and respecting that power, (much as Odysseus will do repeatedly in the *Odyssey*). He transcends himself in a way that the gods cannot do. Without his reconciliation with Priam, it is clear that the wrath of Achilles would destroy him. Without it, the world that is his rightful domain and creation would utterly debase and consume him. Were he to become beholden to his own portrayal of the world, were to be taken in by his own artificial "thus it is," it would devour him. The risks of believing one's own spin are serious indeed. It is his

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<sup>100</sup> Even in the depths of her suffering, Niobe had to eat.



ability to set aside the shield, to escape its illusory effects, that makes Achilles a suitable bearer of it.<sup>101</sup>

The recognition of sameness in the other is a critical part of Achilles' decision to follow the laws of Zeus, thereby elevating himself above those laws. It is precisely such a recognition that is overtly disallowed by the rhetoric of the war on terror. Without the possibility of reconciliation, the claim of the shield, that is the parameters within which the war is understood as a necessity, cannot be challenged. So long as these parameters remain unchallenged both the speaker and the audience of these claims are doomed to live and die by them. There is a quiet usurpation in which the creator becomes subject to the creation. Authority is surrendered by the author, agency surrendered by the agent. Having abdicated authoritative power, the author can make the argument that he or she bears no responsibility for "things being the way they are."

The radical othering of the enemy, so prevalent in the rhetoric surrounding the War on Terror, renders reconciliation impossible, along with any redemptive qualities it might contain or imply. On the ground, this translates into a pervasive message that opposition to the Bush administration's policies is somehow dangerous, unpatriotic, even traitorous. It is seen in the 2004 Republican presidential campaign theme that to choose any other course of action (never mind choosing a new commander-in-chief) is

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<sup>101</sup> Despite his transcendence of both himself and the gods, it can be argued that Achilles does not escape his fate. There is a subtle alteration in this fate however. In his reconciliation with Priam, Achilles' fate is less laid out for him than it is chosen by him. Just as his acceptance of the laws of the gods comes not at the behest or the command of the gods, but by his own volition, so too has he risen above his fate by *willing* it. His death becomes not that which is presented to him by the gods, but that which he has chosen for himself. Achilles becomes the master of his own fate, even if the fate he chooses does not differ in content from that given him by the gods.

to risk catastrophe. Achilles overcomes this limitation precisely by setting the shield aside. Until President Bush is able to do the same, he remains unable to recognise the possibility that his claim of “thus it is” might be mistaken.

### CHAPTER III

#### MIMESIS AS RESISTANCE: PLATO AND BAUDRILLARD ON THE SHORES OF ETHIOPIA

The shield of Achilles is a powerful physical instrument of war. And yet as powerful as it is, it is far more powerful in its figurative operation. The shield makes a dual claim, "thus it is " and "there is nothing to be done." The bearing of the shield can be understood as a shorthand reference to any position making such a claim. The shield is in this way a container. Achilles filled that container with the message "all is war," as did his son Neoptolemus.<sup>102</sup> This is not the only message the shield can put forward. It is capable of holding many and various contents, three of which will be discussed in this chapter. These will be Plato's Forms and his insistence on a single proper ordering of the soul as found in *The Republic*, Jean Baudrillard's insistence on the triumph of the simulacra over the real, and an understanding of Homer's position, drawn from Plato's arguments, that the word triumphs over the deed. The variety of possible contents does not alter the structural features or operation of the shield. Whatever its particular message, it remains a weapon of war, underpinned by violence and the bearing of the shield can have deadly effects. Given that the shield makes an apparently unimpeachable claim "thus it is," the simplest line of resistance to it would be the counterclaim "no it is not." From this point, the corresponding ethos, "nothing to be done" can potentially be called into question. But just how is one to gainsay the "thus it is?" What is more, is anything achieved by such a gainsaying?

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<sup>102</sup> Neoptolemus will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.

This chapter will look at one particular avenue through which resistance has been sought. Specifically, the focus will be on the concept of mimesis as a critical tool and a countermeasure to the advancement of the shield. Mimesis, generally defined as representation or imitation, is a vast topic and has occupied the thought of many of the brightest minds in the history of Western intellectual history. A detailed examination of this history would, and does, take up volumes. Such an examination is well beyond the scope of the present project. This chapter will therefore restrict its scope to a discussion of mimesis as it is developed by Plato in *The Republic* and to its postmodern development in the work of Jean Baudrillard. There are two centers of gravity in this project, Homer and the War on Terror. Plato and Baudrillard are suitable figures for discussion within this constellation, as each can be understood as revolving around the two respective centers, while at the same time maintaining an orbit with each other. Having started with Homer, Plato's *Republic* is an obvious choice for closer examination, as that is where he addresses the poet directly. His concept of the Forms establishes a solid ontological background against which images – including those that comprise the “thus it is” of the shield – can be seen *as images*. As such they are simultaneously like and unlike that which they purport to represent. Baudrillard on the other hand is concerned with applying his particular critique to the War on Terror. He too is concerned with the images and their effects. His notion of the simulacra, the hyperreal, can be seen as an end-stage development of the concept of mimesis. It is through the concept of the image that Plato and Baudrillard are linked. Through this shared concept, both Plato and Baudrillard extend the promise of resistance to the shield. This chapter will not only look at how that promise is extended, but whether or not it is a promise that they can meet.

## Plato

### **Shields and Rings: Plato Against the Poets**

Figuratively speaking, the ill effects of the shield are of great concern to Plato, who sees Homer himself as a bearer of it. Plato does not speak of the shield directly, but he does speak of the ring of Gyges, which functions in a strikingly similar way. The ring of Gyges, first mentioned by Glaucon in Book II of *The Republic*, allows its bearer to become invisible. Protected by this invisibility, the wearer of the ring is free to act with impunity. The wearer is free to disavow any and all responsibility for his or her actions, just as the bearer of the shield can disavow any role in creating the world the shield purports to reflect. The claim voiced by Glaucon is that:

[If] there were two such rings, one worn by the just man, the other by the unjust, no one, as these people think, would be so incorruptible that he would stay on the path of justice or bring himself to keep away from other people's property and not touch it, when he could with impunity take whatever he wanted from the market, go into houses and have sexual relations with anyone he wanted, kill anyone, free all those he wished from prison, and do the other things which would make him like a god among men. His actions would be in no way different from those of the other and they would both follow the same path.<sup>103</sup>

The proximity of the ring and the shield is evident through a number of clues in Glaucon's speech. Gyges is said to have obtained the ring from the hand of "a corpse which seemed of more than human stature" buried inside "a hollow bronze horse."<sup>104</sup> It is difficult to read these lines without being reminded of the Trojan Horse that housed the Greek heroes who themselves "seemed of more than human stature" in the eyes of Plato's

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<sup>103</sup> Plato, *Republic* 360b-c.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 359d.



less philosophically inclined contemporaries. The spectre of Homer looms large indeed. It is far from a controversial statement to say that Homer played a profoundly important role in ancient Greek culture. The ancients looked to the texts as the core of their educational systems,<sup>105</sup> and the Homeric heroes provided role models for the citizenry. His work provided a central worldview against which the actions of moral agents could be judged.

Athenian politics in Plato's time was defined in terms of public debate and the course of action taken by the *polis* was determined by these debates. In the broadest of strokes these topics of debate included the goals of the state and the means by which to best achieve those goals. The importance of these issues and the manner in which they were determined helps to explain the prominence of the art of public speaking, and of its teachers, the sophists. The sophist earned his living by fees earned through educating the young men of Athens in the art of public speaking. That is, the sophist effectively charged for lessons in citizenship. The emphasis of these instructors, (at least as portrayed by Plato), was on the use of various rhetorical devices to evoke the passions and sympathies of an audience. The object was to win the argument, thereby affecting the policies adopted by the *polis*, hence the character and condition of the *polis* itself. As such the effectiveness of a sophist was best measured by the actions resulting from his speech. In an exchange with Adeimantus, Plato has Socrates say:

Do you agree with the general opinion that certain young men are corrupted by sophists, that private sophists corrupt them to any extent worth mentioning? Are the people who say this not the greatest sophists,

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<sup>105</sup> See Ibid. 606e-07a. In these lines, Plato openly recognizes those who see Homer as "the educator of Greece" and that one should learn from him "the management of human affairs and of education, and arrange one's life in accordance with his teaching."

who educate most effectively and make young and old, men and women, into the kind of people they want them to be? -When do they do this?

When ever, I said, many of them are sitting together in assemblies, in courts, in camps, or is some other public gathering of the crowd, they object very noisily to some of the things that are said or done, and approve others, in both cases to excess, by shouting and clapping. Moreover, the rocks and the place of meeting re-echoes and redoubles the din of their blame or praise. During such a scene, what is the effect on the young man's psyche, as they say? What private training can hold out against this and not be drowned by that kind of censure or approval, not be swept along by the current withersoever it may carry it, and not declare the same things to be beautiful or ugly as the crowd does. Our young man will then follow the same kind of pursuits as the crowd, and be the same kind of man? -Quite inevitably Socrates.

And yet, I said, we have not mentioned the strongest compulsion - What is that?

It is that which these educators and sophists add by their actions if their words fail to persuade. Or do you not know that they punish the recalcitrant with disenfranchisement and fines and death?<sup>106</sup>

Here then is Plato's understanding of what it means for Homer to bear the shield, for it is Homer who "seems to be the first, the teacher and leader of all these fine tragedians."<sup>107</sup> It is Homer who teaches the many what is to be considered good and bad, right and wrong. Homer's "thus it is," as Plato sees it, differs in content from that of Achilles' "all is war," being more akin to "everywhere among the race of men, it is the tongue that wins and not the deed."<sup>108</sup> The extended quote above also shows that according to Plato, Homer, as the first among the sophists, makes a compelling "nothing

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 492a-d.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 595c.

<sup>108</sup> This could also be stated as "appearance is everything." See Sophocles, "Philoctetes," in *Sophocles 2*, ed. David Greene and Richard Lattimore, *The Complete Greek Tragedies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 1.97-99.

to be done about it" claim. To resist is to be silenced. Recalcitrance is death. And it is not hard to see that Socrates himself was one of "the recalcitrant."

The death of Socrates gives rise to a problem. In one sense, his death is clearly a case of justice having been served. Socrates' case was heard before the *demos* and a judgment was made according to the applicable institutional standards. And yet at the same time his death is clearly a travesty of justice. How is it that a just decision can be so utterly unjust? The question of justice motivates *The Republic*, and a possible resolution to this problem can be extrapolated from the arguments found there. This possible resolution is to be found in Plato's insistence on a distinction between justice and the appearance of justice. In order for Plato's argument to work, he requires a firm distinction between truth and its image. The concept of mimesis allows him to make this distinction. According to Plato, the images, charms and enchantments of poetry are Siren-like, simultaneously profoundly alluring and profoundly dangerous. The poets and the sophists claim to have knowledge without having it at all. The power they wield is the power to foster and even impose ignorance while claiming to dispel it.<sup>109</sup> In short, Plato sees the poets as wielding the power of the shield, and as sharing in the hubris of doing so.<sup>110</sup> This power is disrupted by the distinction between the representation or

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<sup>109</sup> It is no mistake therefore that Plato says "we must first of all, it seems, control the storytellers." Plato, *Republic* 377c.

<sup>110</sup> Testimony to this power is given by Socrates in the opening lines of the *Apology*:

I do not know, men of Athens, how my accusers affected you; as for me, I was almost carried away in spite of myself, so persuasively did they speak.

And yet, hardly anything of what they said is true. Plato, "Apology," 17a.

Plato takes this distinction between persuasiveness and truth with him into the arguments of *The Republic*, where he challenges Homer directly. The issue of hubris is raised in a notable way in Socrates' conversation with Euthyphro. His failed attempt to discover a fixed definition of piety from one with a reputation for expertise on the matter calls into



image and the real, between dreaming and waking. Plato hopes to show that the power of the image is not derived from the image itself, but from the willingness on the part of the audience to grant it veracity, to accept it as real. He hopes to show that to rescind this acceptance is to short-circuit the power of the image and thus to escape the power of the shield.

Plato sees the sophists, as measuring the goodness or badness (and by extension the rightness or wrongness, even the truth or falsity) of a given statement by the response it elicits within its audience, taking their lead from the tragedians.<sup>111</sup> Plato himself takes a much different stance. For Plato the goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness, truth or falsity of a claim is measured by reference to a fixed standard, that is, by reference to the Forms and to the Good itself. The important distinctions made possible by his introduction of the Forms are most clear in his (in)famous attack on Poetry in *The Republic*.

The sophist and the poet alike are not concerned with truth, as Plato understands it, but with eliciting a desired response in their audience. Plato identifies Homer as being "the first, the teacher and the leader of all those fine tragedians." Homer is therefore at the very head of the tradition that has resulted in the death of Socrates. In a move

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question the self-righteousness of those who have accused Socrates of impiety. How can one be accused of impiety when no one can say what piety is? To claim knowledge one does not have is hubristic. See Plato, "Euthyphro," in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997). Similarly, the character of Gyges in *The Republic* serves as an example of the hazards of "bearing the shield" (or wearing the ring, as it may be).

<sup>111</sup> It is exactly this *ad extensio* that Socrates challenges in the *Apology* when he decries the craftsmen as erroneously convincing themselves that their knowledge in a limited area was broadly generalisable. Plato, "Apology," 22c.e.

reminiscent of the actions of Perseus, Plato aims to decapitate this tradition. Already in Books II and III of *The Republic* Plato has expressed his deep dissatisfaction with the poets. His introduction of the Forms in Books VI and VII sets the stage for the sudden exclamation in Book X that “we are accustomed to assuming one Form in each case for the many particulars to which we give the same name.”<sup>112</sup> This statement shows one of the key distinctions relied upon by Plato in his efforts, namely that between the particular (the object or article) and the universal (the Form or Idea).

For example there are many beds and tables – Of course.  
But there are only two forms for these two articles, one of the bed and one of the table.<sup>113</sup>

In addition to this two part distinction, Plato adds a third, that of the image. Where the object or article is a product of the craftsman with an eye to its Form – its perfection and true being – the image is a product of the poet or painter, or even simply the person carrying a mirror, with an eye to the object. Thus Plato claims that “an imitator is at three removes from nature.”<sup>114</sup>

Plato’s use of the concept of mimesis is not entirely consistent within *The Republic*, but clearly one of its key meanings is the production of images.<sup>115</sup> Since these

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<sup>112</sup> Plato, *Republic* 596a. Julia Annas points out that this “accustomization” is something of a surprise given that all prior discussions of the Forms had been introductory. The only thing that makes the utilisation of the Forms “customary” is Socrates’ (Plato’s) declaration of that status. Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

<sup>113</sup> Plato, *Republic* 596b.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 597e.

<sup>115</sup> Gebauer & Wulf list of different meanings of the term in *The Republic*. See Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis : Culture, Art, Society* (Berkeley: University of



images are disconnected from the truth they claim to reveal, they are censured (and censored) by Plato as dangerous and misleading. The danger posed by these mimetic images, including the word-image,<sup>116</sup> is heightened by another aspect of Plato's mimesis, which in modern parlance is best summed up in the actions of the mime. That is, the danger of the mimetic image is compounded by what Girard will later call the "mimetic instinct" of the audience of those images.<sup>117</sup> People will shape their behaviors to mimic the role models provided to them. In Book VI, Socrates says "do you think one can consort with things one admires without imitating them in one's own person?" to which Adeimantus replies "not possibly."<sup>118</sup> If the "things" one "consorts with" in Homer do not provide a consistent model of that which is to be admired, but rather contradict one

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California Press, 1995). Plato marks a distinction between the user, the maker, and the imitator that runs parallel to the distinction between the Form, the object and the image. He argues that the user is in the best position to judge the quality of an object, moreso than its maker. The mimic is in the position of least authority in regards to the quality of an object. By this line of argument, the products of the mimetic poet are only ever images. However, Plato runs into a problem in regards to the word-image. In the case of the sophist or poet, the product is the word or text, which is both made and used by what Plato considers the imitator. It is the sophist or poet, therefore that is in the best position to judge the quality of their own products.

<sup>116</sup> "The verbal lie is a mere reflection of that which exists in the soul, a reflection of it which comes later, and is not completely untrue". Plato, *Republic* 382b. The verbal lie is not entirely untrue because it does not exist in Plato's ontological framework as real. The utterance is always removed from the reality behind it. Hence the verbal lie is *like* the true lie, which is entirely untrue, but it is not the true lie and thus not entirely untrue. More will be said on this point below.

<sup>117</sup> See René Girard, *"to Double Business Bound" : Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

<sup>118</sup> Plato, *Republic* 500c.

another – as do equally admired tales of piety and impiety, moderation and excess – then the end result can “not possibly” be anything but a fragmented, self-contradictory and confused ordering of both the soul and the city.<sup>119</sup> An education based on what Plato sees as the Homeric “thus it is” can only produce a man “long suffering,” constantly at odds with both himself and others.<sup>120</sup> An excellent example of this is provided very early in *The Republic* by Polemarchus:

Socrates: The just man then has turned out to be a kind of thief. You may well have learned this from Homer, for he likes Odysseus’ maternal grandfather Autolycus, and at the same time he says that he excelled all men in thieving and perjury. It follows that justice, according to you and Homer and Simonides, appears to be a craft of thieving, of course to the advantage of one’s friends and to the harm of one’s enemies. Is this not what you meant?

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<sup>119</sup> It must be noted that Plato, through the character of Socrates, denies the very existence of “a Homeric manner of life.” Ibid. 600b. Yet in doing so he is reinforcing its existence. George Lakoff reminds us that “evoking a frame reinforces that frame.” Lakoff, *Simple Framing: An Introduction to Framing and Its Use in Politics* ([cited]). In denying the existence of “a Homeric manner of life,” Plato is not only reinforcing the existence of such a way of life, but also denying that his objection to the poets, to the sophists, and to public life informed by the tragedians has any grounds whatsoever. (Could it be then that he is offering only a simulation of resistance to such a (non-)“manner of life?”) Yet shortly thereafter, Plato turns back from this denial when he recognizes the existence of just such a thing.

Those who praise Homer and say that the poet educated Greece, that he deserves that one should take up his works, learn from them the management of human affairs and of education, and arrange one’s life in accordance with his teaching. Plato, *Republic* 606e.

For what are such people espousing, if not a Homeric manner of life? See n.4, above.

<sup>120</sup> Homer in the *Odyssey* systematically refers to his protagonist as “long suffering Odysseus.” Plato recognises Odysseus as a key figure in Homer’s epics, and he tends to equate the two figures. He is far from alone in doing this, as noted by Clayton. See Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer’s Odyssey*. Odysseus is a critical figure, but he is also a tremendously difficult figure. More will be said about Odysseus and Plato’s understanding of him in Chapter IV.

Polemarchus: No, by Zeus, he said, I don't know any longer what I meant...<sup>121</sup>

A city guided by such a model, according to Plato, cannot help but be in a constant state of strife and upheaval. This upheaval is precisely what Plato himself lived through in the war with Sparta. It is expressed in the collapse of the Athenian empire under the weight of its own *hubris*.<sup>122</sup> It is expressed in the rapid flux of the Athenian government from a democracy to an oligarchy and back again. The predominance of what Plato sees as Homeric models allows for the sophist, with the approval of the many, to "justly" murder the just man, Socrates.<sup>123</sup>

The primary exemplar of one beholden to such a model in *The Republic* is Thracymachus. For Thracymachus, "the just is nothing else than the advantage of the stronger."<sup>124</sup> Plato sees in this position the figural bearing of the shield. He is aware, as indicated earlier, that this position is illusory. Plato is equally aware that as such it cannot withstand logical scrutiny, but will instead maintain itself by force.<sup>125</sup> The entry

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<sup>121</sup> Plato, *Republic* 334b.

<sup>122</sup> Thucydides, famous for his recounting of this conflict, is perhaps best known for two segments of his account, namely the Melian dialogue and Pericles' funeral oration. Both show Athens in the height of its power and self-righteousness in that power. However, Thucydides follows each of these pieces with a calamity, the plague and the disastrous Sicilian campaign. Although a detailed argument is not possible here, it does appear that Thucydides' juxtaposition of these events (*hubris* and disaster) is not accidental. See Thucydides and Lattimore, *The Peloponnesian War*.

<sup>123</sup> In so far as Socrates represents the presence of justice itself in the Athenian *polis*, this is the truest tragedy. See Plato, "Apology."

<sup>124</sup> Plato, *Republic* 335e.

<sup>125</sup> The shield is, after all and above all else, an instrument of war.



of Thracymachus into the argument comes at exactly such a moment. Polemarchus, arguing the traditional position that justice is to help one's friends and harm one's enemies, has just been exposed as "[not knowing] any longer what [he] meant." The argument has come to the conclusion that "it is never just to harm anyone."<sup>126</sup>

But when we [Socrates and Polemarchus] paused after these last words of mine he [Thracymachus] could no longer keep quiet. He gathered himself together like a wild beast about to spring, and he came at us as if to tear us to pieces.

Polemarchus and I were afraid and flustered as he roared into the middle of our company.<sup>127</sup>

There are a number of features that are notable about these lines and the ones immediately following. First, the description of Thracymachus as "a wild beast about to spring... as if to tear us to pieces" echoes quite strongly a number of scenes in Homer's *Iliad*, and especially those in his description of the shield of Achilles.<sup>128</sup> Socrates subsequently comments that "his words startled me, and glancing at him I was afraid. I think if I had not looked at him before he had looked at me, I should have been speechless."<sup>129</sup> This comment is very appropriate to an exchange contextualized by

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<sup>126</sup> Plato, *Republic* 335e.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 336b-c.

<sup>128</sup> One can easily see Thracymachus filling the role of a lion in the following lines:  
– a savage roar!–

a crashing attack - and a pair of ramping lions  
had seized a bull from the cattle's front ranks –  
he bellowed out as they dragged him off in agony.  
Packs of dogs and the young herdsman rushed to help  
But the lions ripping open the hide of the huge bull  
Were gulping down the guts and the black pooling blood  
While the herdsman yelled the fast pack on – no use! (18:675-683)

<sup>129</sup> Plato, *Republic* 336e.



references to the shield, as it provides an excellent example of the operation of the shield. The words of Thracymachus exemplify the paralyzing power of the shield. It is this stunned moment that would normally spell the end of resistance. Were it not for the good fortune of a glance in the right direction, the dialogue would have ended here, Socrates having been rendered “speechless,” leaving Thracymachus the *de facto* victor.

It is also notable that there is more going on here than a confrontation between Thracymachus the lion and Socrates the bull. Indeed the stage is set for a confrontation between Socrates and the entire tradition Thracymachus represents.<sup>130</sup> This becomes apparent through a number of subtle clues. Socrates refers to Thracymachus as one of the “clever people.”<sup>131</sup> This particular moniker is often applied to Odysseus, who had just been brought up in the discussion with Polemarchus. The allusion to Odysseus and his craftiness carries on. Thracymachus accuses Socrates of being “captious” and when asked if he believes that Socrates intends to trick him, he says:

I know it very well, he said, but it will not do you any good, for I would be well aware of your trickery; nor would you have the ability to force my argument in open debate.<sup>132</sup>

In this comment, Thracymachus exposes himself even more clearly as being a figural descendant of Odysseus (as Plato understands him). For Thracymachus to know trickery when he sees it, he must also be adept at it. Following the logic of the exchange with Polemarchus, if Thracymachus is adept at trickery, he must also be adept at its opposite,

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<sup>130</sup> A tradition Plato would characterise as Homeric.

<sup>131</sup> Plato, *Republic* 337a.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* 341b.

honesty or truthfulness. It is fairly clear that Thracymachus believes this of himself. Socrates must therefore prove that Thracymachus is not even adept at trickery if he is to show the sophist's claim to knowledge to be false.<sup>133</sup> Plato has subtly established that this is not just a debunking of Thracymachus, but of Odysseus, and by extension, Homer himself.<sup>134</sup>

The scope of Plato's task is further expanded to include the replacement of even more cultural icons. Again this is done in a most subtle, almost sub-textual manner and begins with Thracymachus' evocation of Heracles. This in itself would be relatively unremarkable, were it not for the later statement of Socrates: "Do you think, I said, that I am crazy enough to try to shave a lion or trick Thracymachus?"<sup>135</sup> This rather odd saying, combined with the earlier portrayal of Thracymachus as a lion brings to mind the labors of Heracles. In a fit or insane rage – "craziness" – Heracles had murdered his wife and children. As a way to redeem himself he was assigned twelve labors. The first of these tasks was to confront and conquer the Nemean lion, whose hide could not be pierced by any weapon. At this point, multiple parallels between this tale, and Plato's implicit criticism of the state of affairs under the guidance of the Sophists are readily apparent. Thracymachus, already a stand in for the entire tradition of sophistry (which Plato identifies as being led by Homer), here becomes a stand in for the Nemean lion.

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<sup>133</sup> Which he does as the exchange with the sophist proceeds.

<sup>134</sup> A more detailed discussion of the connection between Homer and Odysseus will be taken up in Chapter IV.

<sup>135</sup> Plato, *Republic* 341c.

The position of the Sophist, protected as it is from all attacks, a substitute for the lion's hide.<sup>136</sup> Socrates, then, takes the place of Heracles. Heracles succeeds in his task by stunning the lion with a club made of an olive tree, then strangling it to death. He defeats the beast *without* piercing its hide. He then proceeds to skin the lion using its own razor sharp claws, taking the hide as armour for himself. It is exactly this operation that Socrates performs on Thracymachus. First, Thracymachus is forced to stay by the onlookers to the conversation,<sup>137</sup> then Socrates turns the Sophists' own tools, his words, against him. This is to say that Socrates out tricks the trickster. Rather than addressing the Sophist's concept of justice directly, Socrates uses an oblique approach, discussing ships' captains, doctors and musicians rather than tyrants or other political rulers. Thracymachus finds himself in a position where his concept of justice is no longer tenable, and his recourse to force has been sidestepped. "And then I saw something I had never seen before: Thracymachus blushing."<sup>138</sup> He is *shamed* into submission.

Thracymachus puts forward the suggestion that to understand trickery is to avoid being caught by it. This is a suggestion that Plato embraces when he befriends Thracymachus. It is Plato's intent to mitigate the ill effects of sophistry and poetry – of

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<sup>136</sup> "You are clever Thracymachus, I [Socrates] said, for you know very well that if you asked anyone how much is twelve, and as you asked him you warned him: 'Do not, my man, say that twelve is twice six, or three time four, or six times two, or four times three, for I will not accept such nonsense,' it would be quite clear to you that no one can answer a question asked in those terms." Ibid. 337b.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 344d.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 350d.

what he sees as Homer's bearing of the shield - by putting forth an understanding of how poetry operates mimetically.

To speak between ourselves – for you will not denounce me to the tragic and all the other imitative poets – all such poetry is likely to damage the minds of the audience unless these have knowledge of its nature, as an antidote.<sup>139</sup>

He offers the concept of mimesis as this antidote (*pharmakon*).<sup>140</sup> Plato seeks to undo the paralyzing power of the shield by showing that power to be illusory. His concept of mimesis (as the production of images) extends the possibility of a properly educated audience of the shield to declare “that is *not* the way it is.” The paralyzing “thus it is” can be understood as having nothing whatsoever to do with how “it is.” Plato thus displays the grounds upon which he can censure Homer (and hence an entire ethico-political system) for providing “a bad image of the nature of gods and heroes, like a painter drawing a bad picture, unlike the model he is wanting to portray.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 595b.

<sup>140</sup> The *pharmakon* has come to be the subject of a good deal of later theorizing. Of particular note is Jacques Derrida's essay “Plato's Pharmacy” collected in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). Derrida's opening words are:

A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game. A text remains, moreover, forever imperceptible. Its laws and rules are not, however, harbored in the inaccessibility of a secret; it is simply that they can never be booked, in the *present*, into anything that could rigorously be called a perception. (p.63)

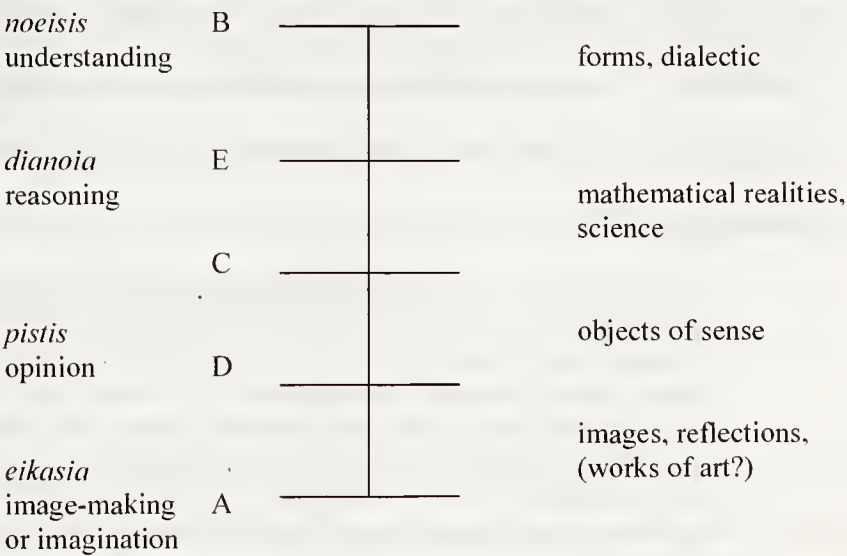
There is an implication here that Plato must also be invisible to the first comer, to the casual glance. Could it be that Plato himself is wearing the ring of Gyges? This possibility will be addressed below.

<sup>141</sup> Plato, *Republic* 377e.



The concept of mimesis as presented here is useful in showing that the mimetic image cannot deliver what it claims to deliver. The image is concerned with the object, which is not real within Plato’s ontological framework. The image is capable of expressing opinion but not knowledge. The image cannot claim, “thus it is.” Or rather it can, but the referent of the claim, the “it”, is “my opinion about the world” rather than “the world itself.” The corresponding ethos, “nothing to be done about it,” can remain in force, but the implications of this statement too are altered radically. It is one thing to say that the world is as it is and there is nothing to be done to change it. It is quite another to say that my opinion about the world is what it is and there is nothing to be done to change it.

This observation is made more explicit using Plato’s image of the line from Book VI. G.M.A. Grube presents this image as a diagram:<sup>142</sup>



<sup>142</sup> This diagram is to be found in Ibid. p.167n16.

Plato's critique of the poets is that they operate solely within the realm of the visible (line segment AC), and yet they argue as if they offered understanding, which is beyond the realm of the visible (line segment AB). But Plato's line does not permit the image (AD) to provide any kind of direct access to true understanding (BE). Thus to bear the shield, to make a "thus it is" claim is to present an image that, *simply by being an image*, cannot be a representation of the Forms, which *are*. The image can say "thus it is" but the "is" can only ever be an opinion. It may be that this opinion is a reasoned opinion (EC) and reason is a guide to what is (BE), but a reasoned opinion is not reason itself, just as reason is not the Good itself.

The great promise of mimesis as a critical tool is that it can disrupt the paralyzing effects of the shield. It promises to provide critical distance from which the "thus it is" can never be anything other than "thus it is like." Where "thus it is" does not allow for the possibility of things being different, "thus it is like" opens considerable space for such possibilities. "Thus it is like" implies similarity without identity. To be like is to simultaneously be unlike, for a perfect likeness ceases to be a likeness at all, as Plato notes in the *Cratylus*:

Socrates: An image cannot remain an image if it presents all the details of what it represents. See if I am right. Would there be two things – Cratylus and an image of Cratylus – in the following circumstances? Suppose some god didn't just represent your color and shape the way painters do, but made all the inner parts like yours, with the same warmth and softness, and put motion, soul, and wisdom like your into them – in a word, suppose he made a duplicate of everything you have and put it beside you. Would there then be two Cratyluses or Cratylus and an image of Cratylus?

Cratylus: It seems to me, Socrates, that there would be two Cratyluses.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Plato, "Cratylus," in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 432b-c.

This reverberates through the “nothing to be done” claim of the shield, which can at best only ever be “it is like there is nothing to be done.” The implication here is that there *is* something to be done. With this in mind, two questions emerge. First, it becomes imperative to ask “how is this image unlike that which it purports to represent?” Second, it is equally imperative to ask, “what can be done?” The imperative status of these questions is evident in Plato’s discussion of the “true lie.”

Do you not know, I said, that the true lie, if one may call it so, is hated by all gods and men? -What do you mean?

I mean this, I said: no one is willing to speak untruth with the most important part of himself about the most important subjects, but most of all things he is most afraid to have untruth in that part.

I still do not understand, he said.

You think, I said, that I am saying something mysterious. I mean to lie and to be in a state of untruth about reality in one’s soul, to be ignorant, and there to have and to hold untruth. This is what men most want to avoid, and they hate this state of soul most. – Quite so.

Surely, as I said just now, this would most correctly be called the true lie, the ignorance in the soul of the man who has been deceived. The verbal lie is a mere reflection of that which exists in the soul, a reflection of it which comes later, and is not completely untrue. Is that not so? – Certainly.

And the real lie is hated not only by the gods, but also by men.<sup>144</sup>

Plato thus establishes a situation in which the inquisition of the image is vital if one is to avoid being hated by both gods and men alike.

### Plato As A Poet

Given how harsh Plato is towards the poets, it would appear to be a damning critique to point out that Plato himself is an imitative poet *par excellence*. Consider that

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<sup>144</sup> Plato, *Republic* 382a-c.

the entirety of *The Republic* is written as a dialogue between Socrates and a variety of more or less ignorant interlocutors.

But when he [the poet] makes a speech as if he were someone else, shall we not say that he makes his language as like as possible to that of whatever person he has told us is about to speak? – We shall say that.

Now to make oneself like somebody else in voice or form is to imitate or impersonate the person one makes oneself resemble? – Certainly.

In these passages, it seems, he and the other poets tell their narrative through impersonation – Quite so.<sup>145</sup>

Yet precisely in the act of critiquing such imitation, Plato is himself partaking of it. It is intriguing that Plato, *in the voice of Socrates*, states in the very next passage “if the poet nowhere hid himself, the whole of his poem would be narration without impersonation,” and “I am no poet.”<sup>146</sup>

There are two things that make this particular passage so interesting. First, by the standards set forth in the passages quoted above, *none* of *The Republic* is written as narration. Everything from the setting of the scene for the dialogue to the retelling of the Er myth at the conclusion of Book X are presented in the voice of Socrates or one of his (lesser) counterparts.<sup>147</sup> The text is devoid of (non-mimetic) narration; therefore Plato must be “hiding” himself everywhere. He is, at least in this respect, wearing the ring of Gyges.<sup>148</sup> It may well be the case that his use of Socrates as a mouthpiece of Plato’s own

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 393c.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. 393d.

<sup>147</sup> The Er myth of Book X comes closest to being narration, but it too is portrayed by Plato as being spoken by Socrates.

<sup>148</sup> Or perhaps the cap of Hades, as Perseus wore before him. See Plato, *Republic* 612b. Plato’s mention of the cap of Hades is a further detail linking the ring of Gyges and the



arguments was well known, even to his contemporaries, but this does not mean that Plato is not concealing himself. His dialogues carry on the same kind of questioning that the death of Socrates was intended to outlaw, but Plato has left himself a safety valve, if you will. If Plato finds himself brought before the court, he can claim that the words were not his, but those of Socrates, who has already been punished for them. This is certainly a measure of concealment on his part.<sup>149</sup> If it were not, then, by the very standards laid out in *The Republic*, none of Plato's works would be presented in dialogue form, as this necessitates the imitation of the other interlocutors. Indeed, the more faithful the author is to the comments of others, the better concealed the author is as an author of those words. The second thing that makes this particular passage so interesting is that Plato is utilizing Socrates' transparency – the open rejection of any status as a poet – to conceal his own poetry. There is a certain distance here between the author and the subject that is being purposefully collapsed. Layers of removal are being effaced, but to what end?

One reason to collapse this distance is to work towards the elimination of the ambiguities that such a distance can reveal. That is to say that a good deal of the power of a mimetic representation comes from its concealing itself as mimetic. Images are most powerful when they are most convincing, and less powerful when they are obvious as imitations.<sup>150</sup> This is what Thracymachus points towards when he says of himself that he

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shield. After all, it was the cap of Hades that permitted Perseus to move within striking range of Medusa without being seen.

<sup>149</sup> Not to mention further evidence, by virtue of his ability to thereby deny his own responsibility for his writings, that Plato does indeed wear the ring of Gyges.

<sup>150</sup> This point is not diminished by Plato's argument that the observance of an overtly mimetic performance is both "enjoyable" and dangerous as it provides a bad model of proper behavior. Plato, *Republic* 605d-06d. The tragic play is powerful in its possibility

is aware of Socrates' trickery, and therefore immune to it. This is supported as well by the famous metaphor of the cave. For those chained in place, the dancing shadows on the wall are utterly real. They have no grounds upon which to say that they are anything but real. For the philosopher, however, these shadows are nothing but fleeting imitations of something that is itself an imitation. The philosopher, having left the cave and turned his eyes towards the sun, is not convinced by the shadow play at all. To hear Socrates speak is one thing. To hear Plato tell us what Socrates said during a conversation where Plato was not even present is another. By hiding himself, Plato attempts to block questions about the accuracy or veracity of his account that might otherwise arise, just as the prisoners in the cave are chained so that they cannot turn to see the fire behind them. Plato, by concealing himself, is in effect holding his audience prisoner, and amplifying the dream-inducing effects of his representations of the truth. "Consider: is this not

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to confuse and mislead the audience, but this power is somewhat tempered by its easy recognition as a mimetic performance. One can, in other words, relatively easily recognize that what happens in the theatre is not necessarily what ought to happen in the "real-world" outside of the theatre. (The phrase "real-world" is not Plato's. He gives the comings and goings of day-to-day life no ontological status in *The Republic*. This he reserves for the Forms alone. It is intended simply to mark the boundary between the inside and the outside of the theatre; between the imaginative realm of the performance space and the (supposed) "reality" of life outside of it.) The larger threat, as Plato sees it, is that the sophists and politicians in this ostensibly non-theatrical "real-world" operate on *exactly* the same principles as do the tragedians. (Both appeal to audience response rather than reference to a fixed and underlying Truth as the measure of goodness or badness.) The problem is therefore not so much that the *demos* will be corrupted by tragedy and mimetic poetry, as it is that the *demos* has *already been* corrupted. Mimetic poetry has left the theatre and entered public life, concealing itself in the process. Plato tacitly notes this shift when he speaks of "those who praise Homer" as an educator and as one from whom to learn "the management of human affairs." (606e) He is breaking down the barriers between the "real-world" and the theatre, disparaging both as all too "un-real."

dreaming, namely, whether asleep or awake, to think that a likeness is not a likeness but the reality which it resembles?"<sup>151</sup>

The amplification of the dream-inducing power of the representation has two purposes. First, for those who are not by nature philosophical, it induces a powerful stupor from which they are unlikely to awake. In this dream-state the reader is more amenable to being led by the arguments being made as opposed to the way in which they are made. Importantly, *this* dream state is a vast improvement over their previous Homeric dreams by virtue of being dreams about, or at least oriented towards, the Good. Second, it is all too simplistic to say that Plato is attempting to imprison his audience, for he is at the same time offering a means of escape, at least for certain philosophical souls. It is as if Plato, in order to liberate his audience, must first imprison them. For those more philosophically inclined souls, this amplification of the dream also amplifies the distortions of the dream. It is as if Plato were exposing the flaws of an audio recording by playing it at a very high volume. In other words, by focusing so intently on the way in which the poets make their claims, while at the same time utilizing those methods, Plato invites the philosophically inclined reader to come and find him.

Then, I [Plato imitating Socrates] said, if I understand what you say, there is one kind of style of narration which the true gentleman would use to express himself and another different style which his opposite by nature and education would favour, and in which he would narrate. – What are they?

Well, I said, I think that when a moderate man in his narrative comes upon the words or actions of a good man he will be willing to expound it in character and not be ashamed of that kind of imitation; he will impersonate this good man acting in a faultless and intelligent manner, but he will do so much less when the good man is overcome by disease or sexual passion, or by drunkenness or some other misfortune.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 476c.

When he comes across a character unworthy of himself, he will be unwilling to make himself seriously like that worse character, except perhaps briefly when he is doing a good deed. He will be ashamed to do so, and also he is unpractised in the imitation of these types; he will resent shaping and moulding himself after those worse than himself, since he despises them in his mind, except perhaps for the sake of play.<sup>152</sup>

The greater purpose of this playful game of hide-and-seek is that Plato wishes the philosophically inclined reader to follow him in his turn towards the Good.<sup>153</sup> To this end, he is quite happy to admit that he utilises the same mimetic techniques as the poets, with one centrally important difference. Rather than pandering to the whims of the many, his imitations are oriented towards the Good.<sup>154</sup> He has taken the out he has left for himself when he says:

Nevertheless it should be said that we at least, if poetry that aims at pleasure and imitation has any argument to bring forward to prove that it must have a place in a well-governed city, should be glad to welcome it, for we are aware of the charm it exercises, but it is impious to betray what one believes to be the truth. Are you not yourself, my friend, charmed by poetry, especially when you see it through Homer? – Very much so.

Therefore it is right that it should come back from exile after making its defence in lyric or any other meter. – Certainly

We should also give its champions who are not poets the opportunity to speak on its behalf in prose to the effect that it not only gives pleasure but is useful to cities and to human life. We shall listen to

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 396c-e.

<sup>153</sup> Plato says:

No free man must learn anything under compulsion like a slave. Physical labour performed under duress does no harm to the body, but nothing learned under compulsion stays in the mind – True.

Do not, therefore, my excellent friend, I said, instruct the boys in these studies by force, but in play, so that you will also see better what each of them is by nature fitted for. Ibid. 536e.

We shall see, below, the extent to which Plato departs from his own rule in this regard.

<sup>154</sup> Plato's "good" mimesis, which is quite literally a mimesis of the Good, operates under the rubric of the "noble fiction" or "necessary untruth."



them in a friendly spirit, for we shall certainly benefit if poetry is shown to be not only pleasant but useful.<sup>155</sup>

Plato in his discussion of poetry is offering both a critique and a defence of it. He is banishing bad mimesis – that which distorts the truth and leads the audience away from the truth – and embracing good mimesis – which is oriented towards the Good.

### **Plato As A Bearer of the Shield**

The poetry of Plato's writing turns out to be not so much of a problem for him as it first seems. The more serious problem facing Plato is that in his effort to distance himself and his audience from the paralyzing effects of the shield, he ends up bearing it. To bear the shield is to make a double claim: "thus it is" and "there is nothing to be done about it." This double claim is structured so as to block critical analysis of it. It presents itself as unassailable. To resist its advance is to defy the gods, or in Plato's case, it is to live in a dream,<sup>156</sup> it is to live unfulfilled,<sup>157</sup> it is to wallow in one's own pettiness,<sup>158</sup> and to be hated by both gods and men.<sup>159</sup> His use of mimesis as a critical tool is useful in pointing out that the shield produces a dream for waking eyes, but it does nothing in itself to challenge the structure that underlies the operation of the shield. Plato, in short,

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<sup>155</sup> Plato, *Republic* 607c-d.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. 476c.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. 585d.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. 586d.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. 382c.

replaces one “thus it is” with another. More specifically, at least in *The Republic*, he replaces what he sees as Homer’s “thus it is” with his own “thus it *really* is.”

If there remains any question that Plato is making such a claim in *The Republic*, consider Socrates’ statements to Adeimantus at the conclusion of Book V:

What about those who in each case contemplate the things themselves which are always in every way the same? Do these have knowledge, not opinion? – That too necessarily follows.

Shall we then say that these love and welcome the objects of knowledge, as the others do the objects of opinion? Do we not remember that we said that these latter loved and contemplated beautiful sounds and colours and such things, but they would not allow that Beauty itself was an existent? – We remember.

We shall then not be out of line if we call them lovers of opinion rather than lovers of wisdom. Will they be very angry with us for calling them that? – Not if they take my advice, he said, for it is not lawful to be angry with those who speak the truth.

And those who welcome that itself which truly is in each case we must call philosophers or lovers of knowledge, and not lovers of opinion? – Most definitely.<sup>160</sup>

This passage shows quite clearly that there is a profound “thus it is” at work. The “things themselves” are what they are and they do not change. They are not therefore subject to alteration by any human action. The ontological status of “the things themselves” solidifies the claim “there is nothing to be done.” Within this framework, knowledge, unlike opinion, is not challengeable or in any way contestable. It simply *is*. Furthermore, Adeimantus’ observation that “it is not lawful to be angry with those who speak the truth” brings the coercive power of the state to bear against any that would question the pronouncements of the philosophers.<sup>161</sup> The tensions caused by the death of Socrates are

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 480a.

<sup>161</sup> Concerning, for example, the structuring of familial relations, or the restrictions imposed on the educational system in the just city. It is true that Plato envisions very little in the way of policy pronouncements or legislation from the philosopher. Such

therefore resolved by an inversion of the power relations that led to his death. Now it is the Sophist who must defend himself in the language of the philosopher and not the philosopher who must defend himself as a Sophist.<sup>162</sup>

Plato, like Perseus, is successful in his attempt to decapitate his foe. In Perseus' case it was Medusa and her paralyzing gaze. In Plato's case it is Homer as the head of a tradition that is epistemologically and politically paralyzing.<sup>163</sup> However unlike Perseus, Plato is unable, at least in *The Republic*, to come to the realization that his prize is still too dangerous to wield. It is not difficult to imagine a situation in which the scene described by Plato in Book VI where he rails against the sophistry of the many<sup>164</sup> – a

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legislation would largely be limited to the structuring of the educational system, especially in regards to the regulation of artistic and physical innovation. (424b) The Philosopher will not concern himself with the operations of marketplace, the bringing of lawsuits and the like for "It is not worthwhile ...to make orders about these for good men and true; they will easily discover most of those which need legislation." (426e) But importantly, the philosopher is charged with not only the maintenance of the goodness and truth of the citizenry, but of the creation of that status among them. Since the philosopher is not always in a position where he is working with "good men and true" he is in a position where more legislation is required. The philosophers walk a very thin line then between leading the *polis* as Plato envisions it and:

[spending] their lives enacting many laws and amending them, believing that they are attaining what is best.

You mean, I said, that they will live the same sort of life as those sick people who, through lack of self-control, cannot give up their bad diet? - Quite so. (425e)

<sup>162</sup> See Plato, *Republic* 607c-d. Thus the injustice dramatized in the *Apology* is corrected.

<sup>163</sup> The "paralysis" induced by the "Homeric manner of life" is implied in Plato's comment that the adherents of such a way of life "are as good as they are capable of being." Ibid. 607a. The "paralysis" is therefore a stasis at a given moral and rational plateau, well below the potential heights of both morality and reason. The "Homeric manner of life," as Plato sees it, can only ever leave its adherents shackled in the subterranean depths of Plato's cave.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 492b-d.

quote that has already been presented above – is repeated as a mirror image of itself. This would not seem to be a problem at all, since in the first instance the opinion of the many is based on nothing but itself, where in the second this opinion is based on knowledge of the Good. Thus, on one hand, the inversion of the scene is also a corrective measure.

On the other hand, this also reveals a difficulty for Plato. Plato describes a situation in which the philosopher must either be divinely guided - as is the case with Socrates and his daemon – or be the end result of a proper public education.

There is not now, has not been in the past, nor ever will be in the future, a man of a character so unusual that he has been educated to virtue in spite of the education he has received from the mob, a human character that is, for the divine, as the proverb goes, we exclude from our argument, my friend. We must realise that if any character is saved and becomes what it should, in the present state of our societies, you would not be wrong to say that it has been saved by a god's intervention.<sup>165</sup>

The establishment of the just city must therefore be accomplished by a philosopher of the second sort, for the city that could produce the uncorrupted philosopher by public education is already the city that such a philosopher would found. Furthermore, the task of this philosopher king is to “take the city and men's characters as a draughting board...They would erase one thing and draw in another, I think, until they had made human characters as dear to the gods as possible.”<sup>166</sup> This is problematic for two reasons. First, the erasing and redrawing process implies that errors will be made in the attempt to make “human characters as dear to the gods as possible.” There will be moments in this

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid. 492e.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. 501a,c.



process when the philosopher-king discovers that what he had thought was the correct measure turns out not to be. Yet this does not seem possible if the philosopher-king has the knowledge he claims to have. By Plato's own reasoning, the object of his knowledge - that which is - cannot change. Therefore in so far as the philosopher errs in his policy measures he does not have knowledge, but something else.

It is possible that the philosopher may have knowledge of the Good, but not of the human beings he hopes to shape into its likeness. Indeed, given that human beings are malleable in this way precludes there ever being knowledge of them until such time as they are perfected and no longer change.<sup>167</sup> Thus the errors of the philosopher are attributable to the deficiencies in the medium in which he works, and are not indicative of his knowledge, or lack thereof, of the model. This may help explain the process of drawing and redrawing, but it leads to a second problem.

The second problem is that for the philosopher to shape human characters so as to make them "as dear to the gods as possible," he must know what is dear to the gods. Yet how does one know unquestioningly what is dear to the gods without being a god? It has already been shown that the philosopher is prone to error in his policy decisions. In this respect he is most definitively human, as his opinions about what the best policy is to be will change from time to time. The philosopher is in a position where he both must be and cannot be a god. As the philosopher remains a human being, he remains prone to error and to the altering of his beliefs. However, the city under the rule of the

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<sup>167</sup> This is tantamount to the claim that knowledge of human beings is not possible until they cease to be human beings and become gods. See *Ibid.* 381a-d. The possibility that the philosopher does not have knowledge of the medium through which he works, vis., the human character, is given further support by Plato's claim that the affairs of men and the comings and goings of phenomena are of no interest to the philosopher. (486a)

philosopher is organized so as to preclude any debate as to whether the beliefs of the philosopher-king are correct or not. Even though the philosopher can be wrong, and by Plato's own implication via the image of the draughtsman, sometimes *is* wrong, his correctness is both assumed and enforced.

There is a distinct danger that the power of this image – the correctness of the philosopher-king – could become enchanting even to the philosopher-king. This issue comes to the fore in light of another, albeit related, question. If the philosopher-king is a draughtsman drawing and redrawing the image of the human character so as to perfect it in the eyes of the gods, how is he to know when his task is complete? Plato is quite clear that “until the philosophers attain power in a city there will be no respite from evil for either city or citizens,” and that at such time there will be no grounds for dispute.<sup>168</sup> One possibility therefore is that the philosopher may understand his task to be complete when there are no grounds for dispute, as this is an indication of social harmony. Interestingly however, for all of his vehemence against the power of the image, Plato (disguised as Socrates) then says, “they [those people who were straining to attack us] have become altogether gentle and are convinced, *if only for shame of disagreeing*.”<sup>169</sup> The qualifier “if only” indicates that disagreement may not be resolved so much as the disagreeing party becomes too ashamed to continue arguing his point.<sup>170</sup> It need not then be the case

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid. 501d-e.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 502a. Italics added. There is a clear allusion to Thracymachus who blushes after suffering a logical reversal of his position.

<sup>170</sup> Compare this to the punishment and disenfranchisement levied by the Sophists against those their words cannot convince. Ibid. 492d.

that there is genuine accord among the citizenry as to what is correct, so long as there is the appearance of it. Recall that since human beings are changeable, they are not knowable, for strictly speaking, knowledge is of what is, and they *are* not. As it is not possible to have knowledge about human beings, one only has access to empirical observations of their comings and goings. The danger is that the philosopher-king, led astray by the *appearance* of social harmony and god-like human character may stop short of his goal of *actually* shaping such harmony and character.

What is worse, the possibility of this error being pointed out to the philosopher-king, either by another philosopher or anyone else, has been removed in the process of categorically rendering such challenges impious and illogical.<sup>171</sup> The “good” citizen will, by force of habit, remain within the parameters set by the philosopher.<sup>172</sup> Those that do not are subject to the coercive power of the state. Thus the parameters set by the

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<sup>171</sup> Thus Glaucon’s challenge at the beginning of Book II where he says “Do you, Socrates, want to appear to have persuaded us, or do you want truly to convince us” is disallowed. He makes this challenge based on what he sees as Socrates incomplete answer to the argument put forward by Thracymachus, who is no longer willing to pursue his case, less because he is convinced than because he is ashamed. Of course, almost the whole of the argument made in *The Republic* stems from Glaucon’s challenge and the lessons contained therein would be lost were it not for this challenge.

<sup>172</sup> For the problematic fate of these souls who are good by habit, see Plato, *Republic* 619b-c. The Er myth, which concludes *The Republic* is troublesome in a myriad of ways. Most notably, the selection by an immortal soul of a life that is already fated hollows out the role of education that has played such a central role in the rest of the text. The fate of the habitually good soul may even suggest that a good education, as defined by Plato through the text may prove *harmful* in the end. It is notable that Odysseus is depicted as choosing “the quiet life of a private individual”, in other words, a complete nobody. (620c) He has in the end become “Udeis” (“Nobody”). In his choice, he has relegated himself to what Plato would consider to be his (and by extension, Homer’s) “proper” position, unheralded by anyone.

philosopher, even if they are set in error, cannot be questioned. They are ultimately maintained by force.

It is apparent that Plato's attempt to disrupt the power of the shield has failed. He has succeeded only in overturning its particular contents as it is wielded by the Sophists. This inversion does nothing to alter the structure and operation of the shield, but rather reinscribes and reinforces that power. Yet the promise of mimesis remains. Perhaps a more developed understanding of the concept may prove better suited for the task?

### From Cratylus to Baudrillard

Despite the inability of Plato's concept of mimesis as presented in *The Republic* to follow through on its promise of critical distance, one can, at the very least, retain from it a sense of the promise itself. Plato's inability to undo the *thlexis* (total enchantment) of the shield is no reason in itself to abandon the promise of critical distance altogether. But from what direction might this promise be fulfilled? One avenue of pursuit begins with Plato's *Cratylus*. In that dialogue Plato offers one of the first extant treatments of language - how words have meaning. The key positions in the dialogue are held by Hermogenes, who sees language as operating on a purely conventional basis, and Cratylus who advocates a correspondence model in which words have meaning by hooking onto the world in an appropriate (or what might be called "good mimetic") fashion. Cratylus holds that words are likenesses or imitations of that which they name. Plato, in the character of Socrates, addresses each of these positions in turn. He counters the notion of language as purely conventional by saying:

Socrates: [If] speaking or saying is a sort of action, one that is about things, isn't using names also a sort of action?

Hermogenes: Yes.



Socrates: And didn't we see that actions aren't in relation to us but have a special nature of their own?

Hermogenes: We did.

Socrates: So if we are to be consistent with what we said previously, we cannot name things as we choose; rather, we must name them in the natural way for them to be named and with the natural tool for naming them. In that way we'll accomplish something and succeed in naming, otherwise we won't.<sup>173</sup>

Thus he establishes that language must make reference to an underlying "nature" in relation to which it has meaning. At the same time, he counters Cratylus' position by insisting that language tends to reflect a cosmos that is in constant motion.<sup>174</sup> The problem with this is that it renders knowledge impossible:

Socrates: Indeed, it isn't even reasonable to say that there is such a thing as knowledge, Cratylus, if all things are passing on and none remain. For if that thing itself, knowledge, did not pass on from being knowledge, then knowledge would always remain, and there would be such a thing as knowledge. On the other hand, if the very form of knowledge passed on from being knowledge, the instant it passed on into a different form than that of knowledge, there would be no knowledge. Hence, on this account, no one could know anything and nothing could be known either. But if there is always that which knows and that which is known, if there are such things as the beautiful, the good, and each one of the things that are, it doesn't appear to me that these things can be at all like flowings or motions, as we were saying just now they were. So whether I'm right about these things or whether the truth lies with Heraclitus and many others isn't an easy matter to investigate. But surely no one with any understanding will commit himself or the cultivation of his soul to names, or trust them and their givers to the point of firmly stating that he knows something - condemning both himself and the things that are to be totally unsound like leaky sinks - or believe that things are exactly like people with runny noses, or that all things are afflicted with colds and drip over everything.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Plato, "Cratylus," 387c-d.

<sup>174</sup> And of course "language" here means ancient Greek.

<sup>175</sup> Plato, "Cratylus," 440a-d.

This dialogue ends in a suspended state of indeterminacy. Socrates has not been entirely successful in his attempt to convince Cratylus that words can at best reveal the prejudices of the name giver, nor has he succeeded in convincing Cratylus that names must be judged in their goodness or badness by reference to a fixed being, rather than a changing one.

### **Baudrillard**

#### **The Shield as Simulacrum**

Since Plato's time, mimesis has remained an important, even central topic of Western traditions of thought. Much of this thought has accepted the tacit premise of the argument stated above that there *is* "such a thing as knowledge" that becomes more and more perfected with further inquiry.<sup>176</sup> The basic argument is that words provide insight into the nature of that which they name. Over time the relationship between the word and the world is increasingly refined, more closely perfected. However with the advent of the linguistic turn in philosophy, this premise has come under increasing scrutiny and doubt.<sup>177</sup> One of the more notable contemporary developments of it is offered by the

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<sup>176</sup> The power of this premise is such that it is most often accepted as common sense. The sense of human history (or rather History) as found in Hegel and Marx stand out as two particularly influential and important examples.

<sup>177</sup> Of particular note on this point is the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. He takes up the argument of the *Cratylus* where it leaves off:

Some people regard language, when reduced to its elements, as a naming process only - a list of words, each corresponding to the thing that it names... This conception is open to criticism at several points. It assumes that ready-made ideas exist before words; it does not tell us whether a name is vocal or psychological in nature (*arbor*, for instance, can be considered from either viewpoint); finally, it lets us assume that the linking of a name and a thing is a very simple operation - an assumption

French semiotician and cultural critic, Jean Baudrillard. He is of particular interest here not only because of his thoughts on language, representation and the image, but because he has offered a direct critique of the War on Terror using the tools he has developed. He is also of interest because of an interesting relationship he has with Plato. As Christopher Norris notes:

Philosophers and political theorists since Plato have taken it as axiomatic that though must at some point distinguish between truth and falsehood, reason and rhetoric, essence and appearance, science and ideology. One way of describing Baudrillard's project is to see it as a species of inverted Platonism, a discourse that systematically promotes the negative terms (rhetoric, appearance, ideology) above their positive counterparts.<sup>178</sup>

The relationship between Plato and Baudrillard can be seen quite clearly against the backdrop of Baudrillard's four phases of the image, as detailed in *Simulacra and Simulations*:

This would be the successive phases of the image:

- it is a reflection of a basic reality
- it masks and perverts a basic reality
- it masks the *absence* of a basic reality
- it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.<sup>179</sup>

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that is anything but true. But this rather naïve approach can bring us near the truth by showing us that the linguistic unit is a double entity, one formed by the associating of two terms.

Ferdinand de Saussure and Jonathan Culler, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Fontana/Collins, 1974) p.67. The two terms he classifies as the concept or *signified* and a sound-image or *signifier*. Both terms are entirely psychological and the relationship between them is arbitrary, hence "*the linguistic sign is arbitrary.*" If the sign is arbitrary, then it cannot provide any direct access to an underlying reality. Baudrillard takes this point and pursues it to an extreme.

<sup>178</sup> Christopher Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism: Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) pp.165-66.

<sup>179</sup> Poster, ed., *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* p.170.

Plato's mimesis is exemplary of the first two phases, where Baudrillard's work is more closely associated with the last two.

In the first phase, the image, which, as in Plato and Saussure can be a sound-image, reflects a basic reality.<sup>180</sup> The image acts as a mirror, and it remains faithful to that which it represents. This is the kind of image in operation in Plato's good mimesis. It is also the *putative* image put forward by the unchallenged operation of the shield of Achilles. The image in this phase serves to reveal the world behind it. An excellent example of this particular phase of the image is to be found in Cratylus' position in the Platonic dialogue that bears his name. There, Cratylus maintains, "the correctness of a name consists in displaying the nature of the thing it names."<sup>181</sup> It may be, however, that this mirroring function is only in place because there is no means by which to question the image.

This kind of questioning is made possible in Plato's challenge to Homer in *The Republic*. As has been demonstrated, Plato critiques Homer for offering a distorted representation – bad mimesis – of the real. This is Baudrillard's second phase of the image. It is in this phase that the image becomes associated with the imitation or counterfeit, along with all accompanying negative connotations. Where the first phase of the image is more or less self-evident and uncritical in its approach, the introduction of the second phase allows for a measure of critical distance from the image. In terms of the bearing of the shield, the second phase of the image can be employed as a critical tool. Resistance is possible to the "thus it is" of the shield by way of the counter claim "thus it

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Plato, "Cratylus," 428d.



really is.” (The implication being a precursory “no it isn’t.”) Viewed as a second phase image, the rhetoric of the Bush Administration surrounding the War on Terror, with all of its attendant claims to “tell it like it is” can be seen as a distortion of the truth. This is an important step in that it also brings a challenge to the attendant claims that “there is nothing to be done.” Thus, for example, when Perle and Frum state that we have no other choice but to fight the War on Terror, the arguments they put forward can be seen as misleading, as would be any conclusions drawn from them.<sup>182</sup> Such a strategy of resistance requires access to objectively “better” information, and is an inherently empirical counter-argument. Of course, resistance to a particular instance of the bearing of the shield made along these lines can do nothing to challenge the bearing of the shield itself.

The emergence of the second phase of the image is already implicit in Plato’s *Cratylus*.

Socrates: Perhaps it will seem absurd, Hermogenes, to think that things become clear by being imitated in letters and syllables, but it is absolutely unavoidable. For we have nothing better on which to base the truth of primary names.<sup>183</sup>

This position is a classic statement of a model of language that obtains meaning by mapping onto reality in what can be objectively called better or worse ways. Indeed, this is the argument that Plato, in the character of Socrates, brings to bear against *Cratylus*. He says that most primary words portray a cosmos in constant motion, a portrayal Plato sees as incorrect. The objective classification of words, that is to say sound-images, as

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<sup>182</sup> Frum and Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*.

<sup>183</sup> Plato, “*Cratylus*,” 425d.

good or bad representations implies an unfettered and, importantly, *non-linguistic* access to the real. Without such access, no such judgment is possible “unless you want us to behave like tragic poets, who introduce a *deus ex machina* whenever they’re perplexed.”<sup>184</sup>

The *deus ex machina* of the tragic poets is a headlong rush in to the inscrutability of the gods, and exposes the limits of reason. Plato clearly sees this as an artificial limit, reflective more of the non-philosophic nature of the poet, his own lack of reason, than of an actual limit to reason itself. It is clearly not “the best answer we can give.”<sup>185</sup> By invoking the inscrutability of the gods, the strategy of the tragic poets implies that there are aspects of the real that are not available to human perception or understanding. There are, in other words, places where the truth or falsity of a word, the goodness or badness of its imitation of the truth, becomes undecidable. Without decidability, especially in the case of the so-called “primary names” the entire system of meaning presented by Plato comes crashing down.

And yet regardless of what kind of excuse one offers, if one doesn’t know about the correctness of primary names, one cannot know about the correctness of derivative ones, which can only express something by means of those others about which one knows nothing. Clearly, then, anyone who claims to have a scientific understanding of derivative names must first and foremost explain the primary ones with perfect clarity. Otherwise he can be certain that what he says about the others will be worthless.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 426a-b.

In Plato's case, this phase poses a few distinct problems, as he himself operates as an "imitative poet." Just as the poets he criticises mislead their audiences by distorting and therefore concealing the truths they purport to reveal, so too does Plato. This is most evident in his metaphors of the sun, the line, and the cave. These are well known and very powerful images, but their very power is what makes them problematic. Indeed it has been noted that the power of these images is such that they may even get in the way of understanding.<sup>187</sup> Plato is well aware that any representation of the Good must simultaneously distort that which it hopes to reveal. His images can never be the Good they strive to represent. With this realisation, even his so-called "good mimesis" must bear a close kinship to "bad mimesis."

Indeed, the distinction between good and bad mimesis is faced with a paradox. Even the best mimesis is not the equivalent of that which it strives to represent. The problem is that the "better" the image is as a representation, the greater is its threat to distort its underlying reality (and therefore be bad mimesis). That is, as the mimetic image more closely approximates the real, the more it threatens to obscure the real entirely by fostering the (false) belief that it *is* the real. The more realistic the image, the more likely it will simply be accepted as real, thus hindering further refinement of the image. Yet, as we are told in the *Cratylus*, the image cannot be perfected so long as it remains an image. If the image is falsely accepted as the real, then the unobstructed access to the real that underpins the status of the image as good or bad develops a fatal blockage. An unproblematic relationship to the real is no longer possible. Once this paradox becomes apparent, the image functions so as to conceal it, thereby

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<sup>187</sup> Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*.

circumventing, or at least postponing the ascendancy of absolute relativism and chaos. Once this paradox becomes apparent, the image has entered its third phase.

In Baudrillard's third phase, the image ceases to be either a representation or a distortion of a basic reality and comes to "mask the absence of a basic reality." Baudrillard's favorite example of this third phase of the image is Disneyland. The "Magic Kingdom" in Baudrillard's understanding makes use of its blatant non-reality to conceal the fact that the real "magic kingdom" is outside the gates of the park.

Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America, which *is* Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing that fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.<sup>188</sup>

This is a difficult phase to grasp, but an example is to be found in the shield of Achilles. The images on the shield as it appears in Homer's epic, in the guise of a divinely sanctioned revelation of the world as it is, serve to mask the absence of the world as it is depicted. The claim of the shield is "all is war" and yet this is clearly not the case. This is evident not only by the remembered experiences and future hopes of the soldiers, but by Achilles himself in his reconciliation with Priam, and by the characters of Nestor, Menelaus and Odysseus, each of whom ultimately returns to a life beyond the confines of the battlefield. This is the Disneyland example reversed. The theme park, in its blatant fictiveness, imbues the backdrop of the larger society with a sense of solid

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<sup>188</sup> Poster, ed., *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* p.172.



reality. The shield, in its insistence on its own unimpeachable reality, imbues the backdrop of life beyond the battlefield with a sense of fictiveness or illusion.

The third phase of the image is both promising and threatening. Turning once again to the War on Terror, the possibility is opened that one might see in the rhetoric a strategy of concealment. One could point to the clean lines between “us” and “them” or “good” and “evil” as an attempt to conceal the absence of any such clear divisions. The insistence that one take sides in the conflict, that there is no neutral ground, can be understood as masking the impossibility of a meaningful taking of sides, and that there is only “neutral ground.” To flesh this out somewhat, one must ask the question, “what does it mean to take sides between fundamentalism and itself?” The War on Terror, whatever else it may be, is a clash of fundamentalisms. The key antagonists, Bush and Bin Laden (although the latter has become more of a shorthand for a variety of shadowy figures than an actual antagonist) are both locked into an ideological matrix that is totalizing in its reach. Their way is the right way, anything else is wrong. Both see the other as the very embodiment of evil. Certainly within such a matrix, there is indeed no neutral ground. But the third phase of the image, employed as a critical tool, can highlight that both parties are attempting, by way of their images (the car bomb, the surgical strike, the sound-image of a broadcast speech or audio tape) to force the image back into its pre-contemplative first phase. This is an ironic gesture because the very engine behind the need for such images is the ascendancy of the “relativism” it hopes to ward off. It would be better to say that the images seek to hold the *appearance* of relativism at bay, although it can do nothing about the disappearance of the real (or what

might torturously be called *the reality of relativism*). It is not the ascendancy of relativism, but rather the generalized awareness of it that is circumvented or postponed.<sup>189</sup> There is a profound shift then from the real to the perception of the real, the appearance of reality, as the condition of the image.

Here begins the fourth phase of the image. In this phase, images become strictly self-referential, and therefore not referential at all. They cease to have any connection “to any reality.” Images become pure simulacra. The real becomes doubled in its perfected image so that the only remaining difference between the real and the image is their sameness. Mimesis, representation, becomes its own opposite.

Representation starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent (even if this equivalence is Utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Conversely, simulation starts from the Utopia of this principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum.<sup>190</sup>

Baudrillard employs an analogy to clarify what has happened to the real. He says that the obsession with perfect reproduction has created a “stereophonic effect” akin to feedback,

which is produced in acoustics by a source and a receiver being too close together and in history by an event and its dissemination being too close together and thus interfering disastrously - a short circuit between cause

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<sup>189</sup> Neoptolemus as portrayed in *Philoctetes* finds himself in just this position. His (re)turn at the end of the play to a demonstrable honourability and transparency serves to mask his irredeemable status as an accomplished deceiver and dissimulator. For a more thorough discussion, see Chapter IV.

<sup>190</sup> Poster, ed., *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* p.170.

and effect like that between the object and the experimenting subject in microphysics (and in the human sciences!).<sup>191</sup>

As in acoustic feedback, once this stage is reached, there is no way to tease apart the resultant tone into its original notes. Thus there is no way to distinguish between the real and its simulation. The real ceases to be what it was, as does the representation of the real. Both become *hyperreal*. In a way Baudrillard has come back to the Platonic notion of the apparent as a pastiche of dreamwork. But he does so not to highlight the surface/depth distinction, but to eradicate it. The model is perfected in its image *and vice versa*.

In conjunction with the four phases of the image, Baudrillard outlines three orders of simulacra. The purpose of discussing these three orders is not to offer a full and in depth analysis of them, but to trace the effacement of the real in concrete historical and material context.<sup>192</sup> The first order of simulacra emerges with the decline of the feudal system and the rise of the bourgeoisie during the European Renaissance. The caste system of feudalism maintained its symbolic power by the strict limitation of the diffusion of signs. That the sign remained privy only to select members of specific classes, where they were transmitted by ritualistic practices, ensured that the signs "are not arbitrary."<sup>193</sup> With the decline of the feudal order, the sign became emancipated from

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<sup>191</sup> Baudrillard, *Illusion* pp.5-6.

<sup>192</sup> Baudrillard's genealogical account is useful a guideline, but as is already evident, the hallmarks of the various orders of simulation can be found outside of the timeline he provides. A recognition of this on Baudrillard's part will lead him to the conclusion that not only is our current situation one in which there is no recourse to an underlying truth, but that it has always been so.

<sup>193</sup> Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange* p.50.

its ritual transmission. The sign is no longer obligatory. It becomes "unburdened of all restraint, universally available," and thus *counterfeit*. "Counterfeiting does not take place by means of changing the nature of an 'original,' but, by extension, through completely altering a material whose clarity is completely dependent upon a restriction."<sup>194</sup> This is to say that the first order simulacrum, the counterfeit, replaces the obligatory sign while continuing to play at being obligatory.

The second order simulacrum is closely related to serial production, and is coeval with the Industrial Revolution. Here signs are no longer counterfeit. Signs do not play at being obligatory, but rather override the question of "their uniqueness or their origin" entirely. With the advent of serial production, objects do not appear in an original/replica relationship, but in a series. "In a series, objects become undefined simulacra one of the other. And so along with the objects do the men that produce them."<sup>195</sup> There is a shift from a reliance on the skill of the individual, the craftsman, to a reliance on the machine, on the technological means of production. Just as the status of the craftsman is effaced by the technical capacity of the machine, the status of the original becomes entirely hollowed out in the infinite reproducibility of the object. Production becomes its own end. "Production itself has no meaning: its social finality is lost in the series."<sup>196</sup> Once this stage is reached, third order simulacra begin.

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid. p.51.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. p.56.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.



There is no more counterfeiting of an original, as there was in the first order, and no more pure series as there was in the second; there are models from which all forms proceed according to modulated differences. Only affiliation to the model has any meaning, since nothing proceeds in accordance with its end any more, but issues instead from the model, the "signifier of reference," functioning as a foregone, and the only credible, conclusion.<sup>197</sup>

Here is the realm of the hyperreal.

The primary symbol for the triumph of the hyperreal and of the power monopoly of capital is, or rather *was*, the World Trade Centre in New York City.

The effigy of the capitalist system has passed from the pyramid to the punch card. The buildings are no longer obelisks, but trustingly stand next to one another like the columns of a statistical graph. This new architecture no longer embodies a competitive system, but a countable one where competition has disappeared in favour of correlation... This architectural graphism belongs to the monopoly: the World Trade Center's two towers are perfect parallelepipeds, four hundred metres high on a square base; they are perfectly balanced and blind communicating vessels. The fact that there are two identical towers signifies the end of all competition, the end of every original reference... The two towers of the WTC are the visible sign of the closure of a system in the vertigo of doubling while the other skyscrapers are each the original moment of a system continually surpassing itself in the crisis and the challenge.<sup>198</sup>

It is within the realm of the hyperreal that Baudrillard offers his read of the War on Terror.

### **The Spirit of Terrorism**

In *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Baudrillard addresses the War on Terror directly, or more specifically, he addresses the attacks of September 11, 2001. This short text is both a rethinking and a reassertion of much of his prior work. In his previous books, notably

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid. pp.69-70.

in *The Illusion of the End*, Baudrillard makes reference to “the event strike.” This is the condition of prevalent hyperreality where nothing happens that does not already conform to a prior understanding of how it ought to happen. He uses the Timisoara massacre during the Romanian revolution as his example. In this case, television images of the aftermath of a clash between protestors and government forces were broadcast that included numerous faked corpses. The “corpses” were there for the sake of the television audience so as to give the event a certain sense of credibility, to make it a “real” revolution in the eyes of the world:

The actors and the media sensed obscurely that the events in Eastern Europe had to be given credibility, that the revolution had to be lent credibility by an extra dose of dead bodies. And the media themselves had to be lent credibility by the reference to the people. Leading to a vicious circle of credibility, the result of which is the decredibilizing of the revolution and the events themselves.<sup>199</sup>

Events become bracketed by their expectation, and nothing can open up the horizon of the possible as it has collapsed into its preset model. Nothing is ever anything other than what it is expected to be. Events are “on strike.” They cease to be experiences, or for that matter, events at all. The hyperreal is therefore the realm of the (non)event, encapsulated in the concept of deterrence.

Events are not on strike any more. With the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York, we might even be said to have before us the absolute event, the ‘mother’ of all events, the pure event uniting within itself all the events that have never taken place.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Baudrillard, *Illusion* p.58.

<sup>200</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002) pp.3-4.

The return of events is not accomplished through the destruction of lives or property, (plenty of this had gone on throughout the “event strike”), but through the destruction of the symbolic centre of an entire global system of the (hyper)real.

The symbolic challenge of September 11 is the one challenge the system of global capital – and the code of the hyperreal that underwrites it– cannot respond to. The inability to respond is based on the inability of the hyperreal to allow a distinction between surface and depth. Nothing can stand for anything else because everything is always already a perfect equivalent of everything else. The logic of the hyperreal, hyperlogic, denies the very possibility of the symbol, as it is by way of the symbol that the system can be challenged. In a way, this effacement of the symbol is something like the third phase of the image that operates to conceal an absence. The hyperreal reasserts its hegemony by denying the very possibility of its being challenged. That is, because the hyperreal is vulnerable to symbolic challenge, it works to eradicate the very possibility of the symbol. The question then becomes “how is the hyperreal vulnerable to symbolic challenge?” An answer to this question is to be found in Baudrillard’s discussion of gift giving.

This is the spirit of terrorism.

Never attack the system in terms of relations of force. That is the (revolutionary) imagination the system itself forces upon you - the system which survives only by constantly drawing those attacking it into fighting on the ground of reality, which is always its own. But shift the struggle into the symbolic sphere, where the rule is that of challenge, reversion and outbidding. So that death can be met only by equal or greater death. Defy the system by a gift to which it cannot respond except by its own death and its own collapse.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid. p.17.

The symbolic challenge of September 11 can be understood using the model of the potlatch, a concept Baudrillard takes from Mauss.<sup>202</sup> The entire social institution of the potlatch is predicated on the giving of gifts. The more resplendent the gifts given, the greater the status of the gift-giver. Each gift is therefore a challenge. The receiver is challenged to outdo the gifts he has received, and thereby outdo the prestige of the one from whom he has received. The potlatch is therefore based on an economy of escalation, prestige building on prestige. Each party in the exchange is under the perpetual imperative to outdo both the other and themselves. This is a far cry from the "zero degree"<sup>203</sup> of the hyperreal (non)exchange in which *deterrence* and not escalation is the aim. The "prestige" of the parties in the latter (non)exchange is not even considered, as it is always already equal. Prestige is not even possible within the ubiquitous non-differentiation of the hyperreal. In the symbolic exchange of the potlatch, there comes a point where a gift is given that is not returnable. This is the gift of death, the *death-gift*, in which one party gives his own life to the other. The power of this gift is readily discernable in the figure of the martyr.<sup>204</sup> The only appropriate response to the death-gift is the self-sacrificial death of the receiver in return. On September 11, 2001, the World Trade Centre along with the entire code of which it was the primary symbol was given the death-gift. The towers themselves responded to this gift according to the economy of

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<sup>202</sup> See Mike Gane's introduction to Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange*.

<sup>203</sup> Baudrillard, *Illusion* p.63.

<sup>204</sup> A recognition of and response to this power can be seen in the efforts made in the Western press to downplay and deny the status of the September 11 hijackers as martyrs, branding them instead as "cowards."



exchange in which it was given. “When the two towers collapsed, you had the impression that they were responding to the suicide of the suicide-planes with their own suicides.”<sup>205</sup>

The system of which the towers were the symbol has responded, to be sure, but not within the same economy of exchange. The “appropriate” response would have been for the system itself to implode, like the towers did. However, the response has been to reject this gift. The system has reasserted itself “in the position of God (divine omnipotence and absolute moral legitimacy).”<sup>206</sup> As seen from within the logic of the potlatch, this is to unilaterally declare the game to be completed with the giving of the penultimate gift. It is to declare victory before the game has concluded. It is a declaration of victory which is at the same time an admission of defeat. The events of September 11 - and it is important to note *that they were events* – expose the vulnerability of the system and its hyperlogic. The system rests on its perfection in accord with its own models. Its “reality” is expressed in the form of the universal law. The “rule of law” and the rule of the code are indistinguishable. Yet the basic tenets of law – that crime is punished, and the state is the locus of executive power (literally the power to *execute*) – are exposed to an unanswerable challenge. The ritual, crucial in the continual reestablishment of the state monopoly on force, wherein crime is followed by state

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<sup>205</sup> Baudrillard, *Spirit* p.7.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. Consider “Operation Infinite Justice,” the original code name for the American assault in Afghanistan. This name was changed only after an objection was raised that infinite justice was the prerogative of God/Allah alone. Despite the name change, Baudrillard’s assertion bears considerable weight. Consider also President Bush’s claim that “freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and God is not neutral between them.” Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, 20 September, 2001* ([cited]., 55.

sanctioned (and executed) punishment is interrupted when the crime and the punishment are condensed in to a single moment.

A transcendent, "objective" agency requires a delegation of justice, death and vengeance. Death and expiation must be wrested from the circuit, monopolised at the summit and redistributed. A bureaucracy of death and punishment is necessary, in the same way as there must be an abstraction of economic, political and sexual exchanges: if not, the entire structure of social control collapses.<sup>207</sup>

On September 11, the crime (the murder of innocents) and the punishment (the death of the perpetrators) are one and the same. The state is entirely excluded from the exchange. It can only *retroactively* reassert its power monopoly, adding it on artificially to the *fait accompli*.

The other response remaining for the state is to invert the situation, that is to reabsorb the event into the simulation. The system feverishly reproduces the spectularity of the event so that it becomes lost in its own spectacle. It is not the omnipotence of the system that is added to the event, but the event that is added to the omnipotence of the system.

The fascination with the attack is primarily a fascination with the image (both its exultatory and its catastrophic consequences are themselves largely imaginary).

In this case, then, the real is superadded to the image like a bonus of terror, like an additional *frisson*: not only is it terrifying, but, what is more, it is real. Rather than the violence of the real being there first, and the *frisson* of the image being added to it, the image is there first, and the *frisson* of the real is added.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange* p.175.

<sup>208</sup> Baudrillard, *Spirit* p.29.

In a move reminiscent of the third phase of the image, the system itself operates to conceal the cracks made visible in its claims to omnipotence.<sup>209</sup> Thus the “shock and awe” strategy is not primarily that which marked the opening days of the war in Iraq, but that which the entire system undertook from the moment the second plane hit the South tower of the World Trade Centre. It is the immediate call to arms that reinstates the power of the state. It is “Operation Infinite Justice” that repositions the state in the position of God. Its intended audience was not so much the Iraqi military forces as the citizenry of the “civilised” West. If the (counter)attacks of September 11 challenged the system on the symbolic level, the subsequent (non)response of the system has worked to efface and deny that challenge.<sup>210</sup> The system that is already dead “proves” its vitality by spreading death, by making its condition universal.

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<sup>209</sup> The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were attacks on the pillars of American power – globalised capital and military might. Much of the speculation regarding the intended target of the fourth plane that went down in rural Pennsylvania has claimed that it was headed to the White House. But what if, like the two planes that crashed in New York, it was headed to the Pentagon as well? The question becomes “what need is served by making the statement that it was intending to target the White House?” Were the White House to have been hit, it would have been identified in no uncertain terms as one of the central pillars of the American global hegemony. It is possible that the insistence that the White House (or perhaps Congress) was a target does the same thing. This claim is the reinstitution of a belief that power resides in the elected leadership and therefore in the electorate, (the voting public). To say that the White house was the target is to say “your vote counts!” in an oblique, yet enthymatically discernable way, despite the evidence to the contrary to be found in the 2000 election.

<sup>210</sup> I use the term (counter)attack to indicate that the events of September 11 were already embedded in an ongoing exchange, and did not occur entirely *ex nihilo*. An earlier attack on the World Trade Centre had occurred in 1993, indicating that the grievances were not new.

### “Hyperrealist Abjection” or The Shield of Baudrillard

The critique offered by Baudrillard, like that offered by Plato, promises to provide a sense of critical distance from the image of the shield by exposing it *as an image*.

Speaking of the 1991 Gulf War, he says:

The question is not whether one is for or against war, but whether one is for or against *the reality of war*. Analysis must not be sacrificed to the expression of anger. It has to be directed in its entirety against reality, against manifestness - here against the manifest reality of this war. The Stoics contest the very self-evidence of pain, when the body's confusion is at its height. Here, we must contest the very self-evidence of war, when the confusion of the real is at its height. We must hit out at the weak point of reality. It's too late afterwards: you're stuck with the "acts of violence", stuck in realist abjection.<sup>211</sup>

His comments are easily applicable to the current War on Terror, especially as it is played out in the ongoing conflict in Iraq. He is right to suggest that war should be challenged in its "manifest reality" – as something that "must be done." He is also right in noting the many parallels between the (Second) Gulf War and the Trojan War, thereby "giv[ing] force to the illusion of war, rather than becom[ing] an accessory to its false reality."<sup>212</sup> However, he cannot escape the flip side of the "realist abjection" he so vociferously

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<sup>211</sup> Baudrillard, *Illusion* pp.63-64.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. p.64. Drawing on the version of events dramatised in Euripides' *Helen*, Baudrillard says: "If the Helen of the Trojan War was a simulacrum, what was the Gulf War's Helen? Where was there a simulacrum here, *except in the simulacrum of war itself?*" (p.65) It seems to me at least that he too hastily jumps to this conclusion, as Helen is a *causus bellum*, a role filled in the Gulf War by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. In the current conflict in Iraq, (the Second Gulf War), the simulacrum of Weapons of Mass Destruction looms large. Following Baudrillard's logic, the current conflict is even less real (or rather more hyperreal) than its predecessor. A simulated war waged on a simulated premise. A reproduction of the original as it ought to have been (e.g. the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the institution of a friendly democratic state in the Middle East). Current conditions, expressed in an increasing death toll and instability in Iraq two years after the American invasion are evidence of the real that refuses to be contained in its model.



opposes. In his many comments including “we no longer have the choice of advancing, of preserving in the present destruction, or of retreating -but only of facing up to this radical illusion,”<sup>213</sup> and “there is no remedy for this extreme situation, and war is certainly not a solution”<sup>214</sup> Baudrillard remains deeply abject. The only difference is that his is a *hyperrealist abjection*.

Like Plato before him, Baudrillard is incapable of following through on his promise to provide critical distance. Indeed, he ends up doing the opposite and collapsing all possible distance in an incessant onslaught of images that no longer fade away into the past. Nor do they offer any promise for the future, but are always recycled and recirculated in the now. Baudrillard, like Plato before him, ends up bearing the shield himself. Phrased in terms of the dual claim of the shield, Baudrillard gets as far as “thus it isn’t”, (or specifically “all is simulated”), which in the end is a thinly veiled version of the “thus it is” claim. All the same, he arrives at the same ethos; “nothing to be done.”

Baudrillard is quite explicit about this, and yet, interestingly, he is ambivalent in his explicitness. As already discussed, he tends to leave his readers stranded in a deep melancholia from which there is no escape. On the other hand, in his essay “The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media” Baudrillard notes the “forced silence of the masses in the media” as not “a sign of passivity and of alienation, but to the contrary an

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid. p.123.

<sup>214</sup> Baudrillard, *Spirit* p.34.

original strategy, an original response in the form of a challenge.”<sup>215</sup> Baudrillard’s point is that if the images produced by the mass media are intended to ensnare the will of the masses, the masses have learned to resist by a wholesale abdication of rational choice, the will, knowledge and liberty.

The deepest desire is perhaps to give the responsibility for one’s desire to someone else. A strategy of ironic investment in the other, in the others; a strategy toward others not of appropriation but, on the contrary, of expulsion, of philosophers and people in power, an expulsion of the obligation of being responsible, of enduring philosophical, moral, an political categories.<sup>216</sup>

Baudrillard is saying that once the masses are completely devoid of will, desire, even the capacity to act independently, they are immune to manipulation by the media, much the same way the soldier, allowing himself to be killed by Achilles’ spear, is immune to the stunning effects of the shield.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Poster, ed., *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* p.208. It is clear that Baudrillard sees in the mass media another iteration of the bearing of the shield. For him, the media operate in the realm of simulacra, but present their images against a traditional system of values.

It is a lack of relationship between the two systems which today plunges us into a state of stupor. That is what I said: stupor. To be more objective one would have to say: a radical uncertainty as to our own desire, our own choice, our own opinion, our own will. (p.209)

Here is exactly the paralysis engendered by the shield, even if Baudrillard is correct in saying that this is “a completely new species of uncertainty, which results not from a *lack* of information but from information itself and even from an *excess* of information.” (p.210)

<sup>216</sup> Ibid. p.215.

<sup>217</sup> It does seem odd to declare this a form of resistance, but it does, ultimately, put an end to the manipulative power of the mass media, or to the “all is war” of Achilles’ shield. In the first case, it renders such manipulation entirely unnecessary, as its aim is already accomplished. In the second, war will eventually stop if only because there is no one left to kill. In either case the “success” of this resistance – one dare not call it a “strategy” for this implies a deliberate course of action – does not leave the possibility of any action

Christopher Norris, noting the desperation of this position also notes its central logical flaw. That is, Baudrillard's position, while propounding the wholesale rejection of appeals to truth must simultaneously sustain them:

Baudrillard in effect contrives to have it both ways by playing on these distinctions – without which he could not even begin to articulate his case – while rhetorically denying that they possess any kind of operative force. So long as we do not read too carefully he can thus carry off the performative trick of conjuring away with one hand those same criteria (truth, reality, history, etc.) which he then summons up with the other for purposes of contrastive definition.<sup>218</sup>

If Plato's position suffers from what can be understood as an overabundance of the real, Baudrillard suffers from the opposite malady. Baudrillard's near total effacement of the real leaves him no grounds upon which to articulate a system of justice. He cannot, if he is to be consistent, mark any policy as favourable over any other. It does not matter if one is opposed to the reality of war or not because *there is no reality of war*, and this is so because *there is no reality at all*.

Baudrillard's position may be even more tenuous than this because if he is to insist on the radical illusion of the world, he must preserve the real that he says is irretrievably lost. The real is not lost, for it were truly lost, Baudrillard would have nothing upon which to rest his overwhelming melancholia. Indeed, through Baudrillard's work the real is decidedly *not* lost, but sealed away, cryogenically suspended and

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whatsoever beyond its successful implementation. It is a "success" only in the way Ajax's suicide was a "successful" resolution to his conflict with Odysseus - and Homer brings even this into question. His portrayal of Ajax as unwilling to speak to Odysseus when he visits the land of the dead demonstrates the conflict to be perpetually *unresolved*, even *unresolvable*.

<sup>218</sup> Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism: Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy* p.182.

permanently inaccessible, yet always locatable in its absence. In denying the real, Baudrillard must simultaneously confirm it. The confirmation through cryogenization of the real resuscitates the possibility of critical distance in spite of Baudrillard's effacement of it. It highlights his failure to follow through on his promise to provide a perspective of critical distance. Like Perseus, Baudrillard is successful in his decapitation of Medusa. So too is he successful in recognising the extreme hazard of his prize. But unlike Perseus, he is not ultimately victorious, as for him there is no overriding locus of responsibility, nor is there anything beyond the instantaneously transmitted image to which one could be responsible. There is no Athena to whom he might return the Gorgon's head, and the (borrowed) shield.

### **Perseus, Plato, Baudrillard**

Plato's critique of Homer using mimesis as a critical tool adopts the strategic approach of Perseus, as does Baudrillard's hyperreal. Like Perseus, they approach the offending problem by way of a representation. They attempt to diffuse the offending power - Medusa's gaze; Homer's "thus it is;" the predominance of global capitalism - by recreating a likeness of it. Like Perseus, They hope to better approach and (en)counter the threat in this way. The logic of such an approach is that if one cannot resist the gaze of Medusa, or the overwhelming "thus it is" of the shield, then if one is to resist, it must be attempted on different grounds. The likeness and the simulation can potentially offer such grounds.

This strategy is effective, but ambivalently so. First, there is the question of "the strategy" itself, for indeed there appears to be more than one. Perseus either kills Medusa



by turning her own gaze back on her, or renders his proximity and deadly aim possible by recreating an image of her gaze in the mirrored shield, thereby diffusing its power. This matter is far from settled in the ancient texts. The second strategy (that is the second interpretation of Perseus' strategy) recognizes that the offending power is an effect overcome by distance. The image in the mirrored shield, just like the mimetic image or the simulation, acts as a buffer between the threat and the threatened, the claim and the audience, the sender and the receiver. The buffer provides a kind of distance at which critical reflection becomes possible. Here is the standpoint of the detached, rational observer.

The first strategy overcomes the threat by turning its power against itself. A good example of this is Plato's use of mimetic poetry to undo what he sees as the untoward power of mimetic poets. It is important to note that this turning of the threat, (the claim, Medusa's gaze), against itself does not nullify its power. Perseus does not so much eradicate as relocate the power of Medusa's gaze. Neither does Plato nullify the power of mimetic poetry and image making. Nor does Baudrillard nullify the power of the simulated non-event by turning the tools of its construction against it.<sup>219</sup>

In either case Perseus' encounter with Andromeda's father, (the king of Ethiopia), and his army clearly demonstrates that the power of Medusa's gaze remains perfectly intact, even if her body does not. Perseus' strategy does not result in victory over Medusa, or rather over the problem and threat of her gaze, so much as it results in a postponement of that problem. Indeed, the threat posed by her gaze may even be

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<sup>219</sup> Baudrillard seems to recognise this, especially in his discussion of the Stealth Agency whose role it is to utilise the mass media to undo the images produced by the mass media. See Baudrillard, *Illusion*.

magnified after the death of Medusa who, after all, was quite content to remain hidden away with her sisters. In the hands of the adventurous Perseus (winged sandals and all) the gaze becomes much more mobile, less contained. A much larger demographic is now subject to exposure to its fatal power, as the soldiers of Ethiopia would attest. Plato's reliance on the Forms, at least in *The Republic*, leads him into this same trap. Baudrillard's cryogenisation of the real and insistence on the ubiquity of simulacra does the same in his case. Put in the terms of Perseus' tale, Plato and Baudrillard alike remain on the shores of Ethiopia. Their newly acquired power may permit them to defeat all comers, and to render resistance an exercise in futility, but their quest to rid the world of just this power remains incomplete.

## CHAPTER IV

### AFTER ACHILLES

Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns (*polytropoi*)  
Driven time and again off course, once he had plundered  
The hallowed heights of Troy.<sup>220</sup>

For you only have to ask yourself carefully, “Why do you not want to deceive?” especially if it should seem – and it does seem! – as if life aimed at semblance, meaning error, deception, simulation, delusion, self-delusion, and when the great sweep of life has actually always shown itself to be on the side of the most unscrupulous *polytropoi*.<sup>221</sup>

Both Plato and Baudrillard, while extending important promises, do not deliver. Both end up bearing the shield they hope to resist. Plato’s critique begins with his accusation of Homer as a bearer of the shield. What Plato means by this has already been detailed. However, it remains to be asked whether or not this is a fair accusation. In order to provide an answer to this question, the argument must return to the events following the death of Achilles. Achilles was quite unique as a bearer of the shield. In the first place, he was half divine. He already straddled the border between humans and the gods. Second, as has been argued here, he was a suitable bearer of the shield precisely because he had the ability to put it down, to set it aside. His death shows that not only is the shield hazardous for its audience, but for its bearer as well. It does not deliver the impenetrability or invulnerability it offers. What is more, its appearance of invulnerability can diminish the bearer’s awareness of his or her own vulnerabilities.

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<sup>220</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey* 1.1-3.

<sup>221</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) p.282. Hereafter *GS*.

After the death of Achilles, his armour, including the shield, becomes the prize in a contest between heroes. What of the respective characters of those who would vie for its possession after his death? Keeping in mind the central question of how one can resist the power of the shield, can anything be learned about what it means to bear the shield after Achilles?

### Warnings Unheeded

The two contestants reaching for this prize were Odysseus and Ajax, son of Telamon. Achilles had identified both as "my dearest friends in all the Achaean armies, even in my anger." (9:238-239)<sup>222</sup> As such, both had a legitimate claim to the arms. Yet the two contestants could not have been less alike in character. Ajax, a blood relative of Achilles, is most like Achilles in his redoubtability on the battlefield and his transparency in his motivation and purpose. Ajax is self-sure, steadfast, laconic, honest to a fault (even to his own detriment as when he angers Athena).<sup>223</sup> Odysseus on the other hand is much more mercurial.<sup>224</sup> He is a "great tactician" with a profound sense of the mutability of context, the fluidity of the battlefield, and how those changing circumstances call at

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<sup>222</sup> I am adopting the standard interpretation that these lines are spoken to Ajax and Odysseus. For a different interpretation, see Gregory Nagy, *Homeric Questions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

<sup>223</sup> See Sophocles, "Ajax," in *Sophocles 2*, ed. David Greene and Richard Lattimore, *The Complete Greek Tragedies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

<sup>224</sup> Especially if taken literally, based on the etymology of the term being traceable back to Mercury, the Roman counterpart of Hermes. Hermes is of course renowned as a trickster, and Odysseus, can name him as an ancestor.



various times for a wide range of sometimes contradictory responses. Odysseus is as likely to be found charging into the thick of battle as he is to be found leading a clandestine night raid, or disguised as a beggar in his own house, depending on the contextual requirements. Where Ajax is known for his “wall-like shield,” Odysseus is one of the only major characters in the *Iliad* not to be associated with a particular piece of battle gear. Yet he is portrayed as a master of them all.<sup>225</sup> He is renowned for his “cleverness,” relying as much, if not more, on his wit than his weapons.<sup>226</sup>

Based on the respective characters of these two heroes, what would it mean for each to win the shield? It should be apparent at this point in the argument that to bear the shield is a hazardous enterprise, both for its audience and its bearer. The power of the shield is such that its claim “thus it is” can be utterly enchanting. Its claim is entirely believable and it is only by virtue of a super-human act of will that Achilles, for whom the shield was made, is able to break that spell, even if only temporarily.<sup>227</sup>

### Ajax

Given the character traits of Ajax, it is doubtful that he would have been able to release himself from this spell. Were Ajax to have won the shield, there is little doubt that it would have been borne into battle, and become instrumental once more in an

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<sup>225</sup> Zanker, *The Heart of Achilles: Characterization and Personal Ethics in the Iliad*.

<sup>226</sup> This is not to say that his prowess with a variety of weapons, is not a central aspect of Odysseus' character. Weapons (the spear, the discus, and especially the bow), remain important for him. One can imagine the limited success he would have had in overcoming the suitors with words alone.

<sup>227</sup> I describe this overcoming of himself as super-human as it requires a remaking of himself. It is at the same time super-divine as this self-remaking (*autopoiesis*) is beyond what even the gods can do.

unstoppable and irresistible slaughter. There is little doubt that, in the name of piety, Ajax would have been reduced to a mere animal killing machine, a position he barely manages to hover above even without the shield.<sup>228</sup> Unable to break free of the "thus it is" of the shield, (the specific content of which is "all is war"), Ajax would be doomed to an incessant recreation of the conditions of its veracity.

After the death of Achilles, and perhaps even more so after Odysseus wins it, to carry the shield is always already a tainted exercise. Achilles exposes the subtle fraud perpetrated by the claim of the shield when he reconciles with Priam. Odysseus, renowned for his craftiness, his ruses and deceptions, wins the right to bear the shield. It does indeed go to its most fitting successor. It is not that the formerly simple truth claims made by the shield become inverted in the form of outright lies, rather it is more that the language used to express such claims becomes less certain in its grasp on the world. It becomes possible to both deceive and to tell the truth in the same statement. Odysseus, as is to be expected, provides a very clear example of this when he gives his name "Udeis" ("nobody") to the cyclops, Polyphemus. This name that he provides permits his escape - "nobody is killing me!"- and yet "Udeis" can also mean "hero."<sup>229</sup> Odysseus thus truthfully identifies himself as a hero, while at the same time denying his very presence. This shift is not applicable only to Odysseus, however. An equally telling example is provided by Ajax.

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<sup>228</sup> The pun here is not entirely unintentional, as after losing the shield he does become an *animal* killing machine. See Sophocles, "Ajax."

<sup>229</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries, *Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) p.47.

The example in question is to be found in Sophocles' *Ajax*. Having lost the bid for Achilles' arms, Ajax is outraged. He is so slighted that he devises a plan to slaughter the entire upper echelon of the Achaean army, including Agamemnon and Odysseus. His plan is thwarted by the intervention of Athena who tricks him into killing the livestock instead. Having been doubly humiliated, Ajax resolves to kill himself. He says to the chorus:

But now I am going to the bathing place  
And meadows by the sea, to cleanse my stains,  
In hope the goddess' wrath may pass from me.  
And when I've found a place that's quite deserted,  
I'll dig in the ground, and hide this sword of mine,  
Hatefulest of weapons, out of sight. May Darkness  
And Hades, God of Death, hold it in their safe keeping.<sup>230</sup>

His words are taken by the chorus to mean that the disgraced hero has set aside his thoughts of self destruction and their fears for his safety are assuaged. Yet at the same time, Ajax has described in detail the means by which he intends to kill himself.<sup>231</sup>

There is a kind of slippage between what is said, what is meant, and what is heard. In book IX of the *Iliad*, Achilles says to Odysseus "I hate that man like the very Gates of Death / who says one thing but hides another in his heart." (9:378-379) When Achilles first carries the shield into battle, there is a direct line of communication. There is no mistaking the message of his "thus it is." After Achilles reconciles with Priam, and especially after the death of Achilles, this changes. The "thus it is" no longer corresponds to what *is* in any unproblematic way. What is said may or may not reveal

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<sup>230</sup> Sophocles, "*Ajax*," l.665-60.

<sup>231</sup> He does find a hidden spot where he buries the hilt of his sword in the ground before falling on its blade.

what is meant. Neither is there any clear ground upon which to ensure that the audience hears what is said or meant. That is, there is no vantage point from which to discern the difference between what is said and what is “held in [the speaker’s] heart.” The shield in many ways ceases to be a mirror and becomes recognizable as a tool, a means by which to obtain some other end.

### Neoptolemus

After Odysseus gains possession of the shield, its fate (as an artifact or object) becomes somewhat unclear. He certainly does not arrive home in Ithaca with it. Given that all his spoils of war are lost at sea, one could conclude that the shield was lost at sea. Were this the case it would certainly support the argument that Odysseus’s ability to recognize and respond to the constant change in the world around him makes him a suitable bearer of the shield. In other words, Odysseus is well aware that the claim “thus it is” is just another bit of flotsam in a vast sea of change. The loss of the shield at sea would also dovetail nicely with the image on the outer rim of the shield. All of the images on the shield are bounded by a depiction of the “great ocean river.” (18:708-709) Thus the depiction of the world thereon is revealed as an island of stability against a backdrop of uncertainty and constant change. Its loss at sea is therefore a testament to the fragility and transience of that stability.

Traditionally however it is thought that Odysseus passed the shield on to Neoptolemus (a.k.a. Phyrus), the son of Achilles. Interestingly enough, this also offers evidence that to bear the shield, to make the claim “thus it is” is not what it seems to be. Following the story of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, the Achaean army learns that victory over



Troy can only come once both Neoptolemus and the bow of Heracles (then in the hands of Philoctetes) reach the battlefield. Odysseus is charged with the task of bringing them both to Troy. Odysseus had abandoned Philoctetes on the island of Lemnos ten years earlier after he had been bitten in the foot by a serpent. Alone on the island, suffering in pain, Philoctetes had fostered a deep hatred of Odysseus. Having already brought Neoptolemus aboard his ship, Odysseus develops a plan to wrest the bow from Philoctetes by guile. Neoptolemus is to be the operative party in this deception. Odysseus encourages the young man to befriend Philoctetes under the pretense that Neoptolemus too hates Odysseus. There is a telling exchange between the two on this point that is worth quoting at some length:

Odysseus: I know, young man, it is not your natural bent  
To say such things nor to contrive such mischief.  
But the prize of victory is pleasant to win.  
Bear up: another time we shall prove honest.  
For one brief shameless portion of a day  
Give me yourself, and then for all the rest  
You may be called most scrupulous of men.

Neoptolemus: Son of Laertes, what I dislike to hear  
I hate to put into execution.  
I have a natural antipathy  
To get my ends by tricks and stratagems  
So, too, they say, my father was...  
I would prefer even to fail with honor  
Than win by cheating.

Odysseus: You are a good man's son.  
I was young, too, once, and then I had a tongue  
Very inactive and a doing hand.  
Now as I go forth to see the test, I see  
That everywhere among the race of men  
It is the tongue that wins and not the deed.

Neoptolemus: What would you bid me do but to tell lies?...  
Do you not find it vile yourself, this lying?

Odysseus: Not if the lying brings our rescue with it.

Neoptolemus: How can a man not blush to say such things?

Odysseus: When one does something for gain, one need not blush.<sup>232</sup>

This exchange shows Odysseus instructing Neoptolemus on how to craft a convincing “thus it is” claim. Odysseus is teaching him what he must do in order to carry his father’s shield. He is telling him how to bear the shield in a figurative sense without falling under the spell of its particularly potent enchantments. Neoptolemus must learn how to bear the shield knowing its claim to be a ruse. He must learn to utilise “truth” claims to suit his own purposes. In the context of the exchange, and as a first test, Neoptolemus must lie to Philoctetes so that the fighting in Troy can stop. It is important to note that the pretext of this ruse is that Odysseus has refused to hand over the arms of Achilles to Neoptolemus. Yet there is some uncertainty as to whether or not Odysseus has actually handed them over. The position taken here is that Neoptolemus will earn his fathers arms, including the shield, once he has proven himself worthy of them *by deceiving Philoctetes*.

Neoptolemus proceeds to deceive Philoctetes under the tutelage of Odysseus, who tells him that tricking Philoctetes will increase his reputation as “a wise man and a good.” The young man gains the trust of the suffering hero by means of a tale of betrayal at the hands of Odysseus and the Atridae, Menelaus and Agamemnon:

I his mourning son, wept for him [Achilles];  
then, in a while, came to the two Atridae,  
my friends, as it seemed right to do, and asked them  
for my father’s arms and all he had else.  
They needed brazen faces for their answer:  
“Son of Achilles, all that your father had,  
all else, is yours to take, but not his arms.

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<sup>232</sup> Sophocles, “Philoctetes,” 1.79-111.

Another man now owns them, Laertes' son."<sup>233</sup>

Philoctetes, operating on the principle that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," aligns himself with Neoptolemus. The hero begs the young man to take him off of the island of Lemnos where he has been stranded, and back to his homeland of Pios. Neoptolemus agrees, and in so doing places himself in an existential quandary, an aporetic juncture from which there is no easy path. Prior to looking more closely at the parameters of this juncture, the conditions under which he enters it should be examined. Specifically, it should be noted that his agreement to transport Philoctetes away from Lemnos comes only after an exhortation from the chorus that he do so.

[I] would carry him  
in your quick, well-fitted ship  
to his home and so avoid offence before the face of god.<sup>234</sup>

Just as he was motivated to deceive Philoctetes by a promise of glorification by his peers, so too is he motivated to help him by a sense of shame at being out done by his peers.

I should be ashamed  
to be less ready than you [the chorus] to render a stranger service.<sup>235</sup>

The irony of these lines is that, given that they are a response to an expressed readiness to offer service, Neoptolemus is already exposed as "less ready than you to render a stranger service." The irony of this moment comes into play again as Neoptolemus' situation works itself through.

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., l.360-68.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., l.512.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., l.524.

The critical moment for Neoptolemus comes when Philoctetes, wracked by pain, goes to sleep while the young man is in possession of the bow of Heracles. As Philoctetes sleeps, the chorus urges Neoptolemus to abscond with his prize. As Philoctetes awakens, Neoptolemus says:

Now is the moment, what shall I do from now on?<sup>236</sup>

The next lines from Neoptolemus detail the parameters of his situation:

All is disgust when one leaves his own nature  
And does things that misfit it.<sup>237</sup>

I shall be shown to be dishonorable:  
I am afraid of that.<sup>238</sup>

Thus the situation is shown to have existential import. His decision will have implications for who is to be both now and in the future. He is in a moment that will redefine his very identity. The second quote shows the paradox to be one of honor. Neoptolemus is honor bound in two incompatible directions. First, he is bound by the authority of Odysseus and the princes who sent him. Odysseus, as if aware of the young man's impending identity crisis, is careful to remind him "it was to serve you came here."<sup>239</sup> The honorable course of action here would be to return to Troy with the bow, giving no further thought to the plight of Philoctetes. This is what leads Neoptolemus to refuse to return the bow:

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., l.894.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., l.902.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., l.904.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., l.7.



Justice and interest  
make me obedient to those in authority.<sup>240</sup>

Second, he is bound by his promise to Philoctetes. The honorable course of action here, on the other hand, is to reject the mission he has been given, to not go to Troy but instead return Philoctetes to his homeland. Philoctetes' exhortations are very pointed:

Give it [the bow] back. Be your true self again.<sup>241</sup>

And again:

You are not bad yourself; by bad men's teaching  
You came to practice your foul lesson.<sup>242</sup>

Neoptolemus finds these pleas compelling, and just as he is about to return the bow, Odysseus arrives. In the ensuing scene, Neoptolemus recedes to the background as the two rivals for his identity vie with each other. Philoctetes is most forward with his invective and his accusations of hubris:

Hateful creature,  
what things you can invent! You plead the Gods  
to screen out your actions and make the Gods out liars.<sup>243</sup>

Uncharacteristically – and yet entirely true to form – Odysseus does not reply to these accusations.

If I had the time, I have much I could say to him.  
As it is, there is only one thing. As the occasion  
demands, such a one am I.

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 1.925.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 1.950.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 1.971.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 1.991.

When there is a competition of men just and good,  
you will find none more scrupulous than myself.  
What I seek in everything is to win  
except in your regard: I willingly yield to you now.<sup>244</sup>

Odysseus then takes the bow and leaves. Here again there is a tremendous irony. Odysseus "willingly yields" for more than one reason. First, Odysseus would be hard pressed to defend himself against Philoctetes' charges. Indeed he has just proven the hero right in simultaneously claiming the capture of Philoctetes to be his own doing - "I and no other"<sup>245</sup> - and entirely at the behest of Zeus - "I am only his servant."<sup>246</sup> Second, Odysseus yields because he knows it is an empty gesture. He has the bow. He is free to leave. Odysseus has already won. Furthermore, if Philoctetes is to cast an accusation of hubris towards Odysseus, he is far from clean of it himself. When asked by the chorus to come to Troy, Philoctetes responds:

Never, never! That is my fixed purpose.  
Not though the Lord of the Lightning, bearing his fiery bolts,  
come against me, burning me  
with flame and glare.  
Let Ilium go down and all that under its walls

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 1.1048-52.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 1.980.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 1.990. This simultaneous acceptance and denial of responsibility is also evident in the opening lines of the play when Odysseus explains the abandonment of Philoctetes to Neoptolemus. There, Odysseus says:

I had orders for what I did:

My masters, the princes, bade me do it. (1.7)

The same is also the case when, in the *Odyssey*, he meets the ghost of Ajax. Odysseus says to the fallen hero:

For your death we grieved as we did for Achilles' death -  
we grieved incessantly, true, and none's to blame  
but Zeus, who hated Achaea's fighting spearmen  
so intensely, Zeus sealed your doom. (11:637-640)

Had the heart to cast me away, crippled!<sup>247</sup>

These are words that Philoctetes will choke on as his departure for Troy is occasioned not by the greatest of the gods in all his power, but by a mere ghost of a comparatively minor deity (Heracles). Once Odysseus and Neoptolemus leave Philoctetes, a second and final exchange of views takes place. Neoptolemus is still torn as to his next course of action. Having decided to deceive Philoctetes, he has heard the hero's exhortations as to why he should not continue on that path. Now, in deciding to undo what he has done, he hears the exhortations of Odysseus. Odysseus had promised a double prize to Neoptolemus; an increase in his reputation both as a wise man and as a good man. In this exchange, he takes away both by promising that the hatred and enmity of the Greeks would come down upon Neoptolemus, and by denying the cleverness of his actions.

What Neoptolemus fails to realize is that the change in himself that he seeks to undo is already accomplished. This is implied in a simple question, posed by Odysseus:

Neoptolemus: I did wrong when I obeyed you and the Greeks.

Odysseus: What did we make you do that was unworthy?

Neoptolemus: I practiced craft and treachery with success.

Odysseus: *On whom?*<sup>248</sup>

This simply query highlights Neoptolemus' position. In his success in obtaining the bow from Philoctetes, he has proven himself treacherous and an accomplished liar. In returning the bow, he does not erase that treachery, but compounds it, for now he has

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., l.1196-201.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., l.1226-29. Emphasis added.

betrayed the Greeks, too. The best he can do is to deny his own agency in the matter, and thus maintain a sense of himself as honorable – a good man that has been taught by bad men.<sup>249</sup> Yet in doing this he only renders himself treacherous and deceitful *even to himself*. A single deception has been multiplied threefold. Neoptolemus remains a deceiver and a liar, a dissimulator, but unlike Odysseus, not a self-conscious one. The young man's "transparency" masks his duplicity.

The lesson that Odysseus has to teach is not one that Neoptolemus – whose name translates literally as "new war" – can learn. He becomes like his father prior to the reconciliation with Priam. Indeed it is Neoptolemus who kills Priam before the altar of Apollo, along with "scores" of other Trojan defenders.<sup>250</sup> The extent to which he is enthralled by the claim of the shield is made apparent in Odysseus's retelling of his actions while within the Trojan horse. As the soldiers wait for nightfall inside the hollow belly of the great wooden horse, Helen walks around the outside of it, calling each soldier by name in the voice each of their wives.<sup>251</sup> Where all others are tempted to the breaking point by this call from a peaceful life left behind, Neoptolemus alone does not flinch. Unable to distance himself from the claim of the shield, he is unmoved by a call from a life that does not exist. If all is war, there is no peaceful life to return to, so that call has no import to him whatsoever. Furthermore, even after the conclusion of the war in Troy,

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<sup>249</sup> Neoptolemus' decision to take this course of action would lead him to place all of his decisions in the hands of the gods, and as such may go a long way in explaining the need for the *deus ex machina* at the conclusion of Sophocles' play.

<sup>250</sup> Many of his deeds are recounted when Odysseus meets Achilles in the kingdom of the dead. See Homer, *The Odyssey* 11.576-606.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid. 4.307-23.



Neoptolemus continues in his violent ways. He sacks the temple of Apollo at Delphi when the god refuses to side with him in a dispute. He meets his final end when he is ritually murdered after refusing to allow the priests of Apollo to take the cattle he has slaughtered in offering. In short, having taken up his father's shield, he is unable to put it down again. Since he cannot - or will not - recognize its portrayal of permanent warfare as an effect(ive) tool for the furthering of a specific goal, within a specific context, he becomes locked into the world it creates. He yields his authority to the shield, which then rules him.

Neoptolemus provides an object lesson in what it means to bear the shield after the death of Achilles. He bears the shield, but not in the same way his father did. Unlike Achilles, Neoptolemus takes up the shield, but never puts it down again. In this sense he provides an *abject* lesson, for he bears the shield at his own peril. He becomes locked into his own illusion, unable to maintain any distance from it. He remains convinced of the correctness and justice of his own claims, to the point of demonstrating an extreme level of hubris. His inflexibility in this regard renders conflict with others unavoidable.<sup>252</sup> Neoptolemus bears the shield both literally and figuratively. He may be the last to bear it literally, but he is far from the last to do so figuratively. Thus the power of the shield, which is from the outset based more in its figural than its literal operation,

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<sup>252</sup> This is not to say that the conflicts themselves are unavoidable, and even less to say that conflict in general is unavoidable. It may be that there is an irreducible possibility of conflict, but this does not mean that it is inevitable.

remains undiminished long after the disappearance of the physical object.<sup>253</sup> Hence the problem posed by the shield, namely the question as to how one can resist its power, also remains. It is to this question that the argument now turns.

### Odysseus: Artfulness Above All Else

It is true that after the death of Achilles, Odysseus wins his armour and the *right* to bear the shield. It is also true that he *never does* bear the shield. It should now be asked what it means that Odysseus wins the right to bear the shield, but does not bear it. First, an observation from the tale of Perseus: The victory over Medusa (over the fatal power of her gaze) is achieved only when Perseus relinquishes the severed head of the Gorgon over to Athena. Perseus is successful, which in this instance means heroic rather than tyrannical, when he abdicates the power that has rightfully become his to wield.<sup>254</sup> By not bearing the shield, Odysseus does much the same thing. He recognizes the shield as a tool that for him is redundant. It is a bit of technological trickery that can permit a decidedly "honest" or "truthful" character, like Achilles or Neoptolemus, to accomplish a stunningly powerful ruse.<sup>255</sup> Given his innate ability to execute such ruses, such a tool

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<sup>253</sup> Assuming, for the sake of argument that there ever was a physical object. Indeed the figural power of the shield is brought into further relief when one considers that it only ever existed in a notional sense, as a bit of textual fiction.

<sup>254</sup> Perseus' heroism in this sense is a dual victory both over the power of Medusa's gaze and the tyranny of Polydectes. It should be noted that this victory is not simply allegorical as Perseus' last action before returning his prize is to reveal it to Polydectes, petrifying him and ending his reign of terror over Perseus' mother, Danaë.

<sup>255</sup> The terms "honest" and "truthful" are placed in scare quotes here precisely because of the difficulty Odysseus reveals in their typical usage. See Plato, "Lesser Hippias," in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

would be all but useless in the hands of Odysseus. Better yet to say that it would be redundant, but dangerously so.

Odysseus recognizes in the shield the externalization of a power of manipulation – of what amounts to mimetic *poises* on a grand scale – that threatens to be uncontrollable so long as it is externalized. Placed outside of the actor, the externalization of the power to create is all too easily surrendered. The presence of the external creation (the object in a material sense; the shield; the book) renders it all too easy to abdicate one's powers of creation to the reified creation. Odysseus' ruses, the representations and images of himself he puts forward for others remain largely under his control because they remain within himself. This is to say that operating in an oral rather than literary culture, he can shape and twist his stories of himself at will. Were any of his tales to be written in stone, or rather in gold, silver, tin and bronze, he would lose that control. He would become subject to his own creations.<sup>256</sup> As it is, Odysseus nearly loses himself in his own artifice, as is seen in his encounter with his aging father, Laertes.

Throughout his travels Odysseus tells many tales about himself, each designed to both conceal himself and to hasten his homecoming. It is not difficult to see how his concealment of himself as "Udeis" (Nobody) before Polyphemus is prudent. Likewise, when he disguises himself as a beggar before the suitors. These fabrications are easy to explain against the greater backdrop of his desired homecoming. The episode involving

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<sup>256</sup> This is not to say that he would necessarily lose all control, nor is it to say that *poiesis* in a material sense is ill advised. It is to say that a different kind of control, of mastery over one's self, is required. Odysseus's self-mastery is one of the few redeeming qualities Plato recognises in him. It also makes an appearance in Nietzsche's work, which will be discussed, below.

Laertes is intriguing because it strips away much of the backdrop against which Odysseus' other fabrications of his identity can be seen as legitimate or justifiable. He has achieved his goal. His enemies are defeated. He has returned and reclaimed his kingdom. It would seem that he has nothing left to fear, no agenda to advance. All the same he introduces himself to his grieving father under the guise of yet another false identity. This scene has been read in a number of different ways, summarized nicely by Barbara Clayton.<sup>257</sup> The reading here has a certain affinity with Pratt's commentary:

The poem insists that we once more appreciate Odysseus' ability to invent and deceive, even though the results are hurtful. In asking us to accept such a gratuitous falsehood, one that brings temporary but real pain to its hearer without advancing the plot, the *Odyssey* seems to favour artfulness above all else.<sup>258</sup>

However much of an "appreciation" this is, it is also a warning. The emphasis on "artfulness above all else" can indeed be found in the *Odyssey* and especially in its eponymous hero. This same "artfulness" is to be found in the operation of the shield of Achilles. It is with this artfulness that Plato takes issue.

To be sure, Plato does not mistake the threat of "artfulness above all else" but he does appear to miss the fact that Homer himself recognizes the danger. Plato's treatment of Homer in *The Republic* as a "bearer of the shield" tends to flatten out Homer's perspective, to condense his message into a single, if contradictory, viewpoint. The warning contained within the encounter between Odysseus and Laertes, and which Plato misses in *The Republic*, is that this same "artfulness" can become too much "above all

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<sup>257</sup> Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's Odyssey* pp.78-79.

<sup>258</sup> L. Pratt, quoted in *Ibid.* p.78n59.



else.”<sup>259</sup> The creator can too easily be taken in by his or her creation. The hazard then resides in the *artful obfuscation of artfulness itself*. If art works to conceal art, creativity to conceal creativity, *poiesis* to conceal *poiesis*, then one can fall into a place where the ethos “there is nothing to be done” can more easily hold command.<sup>260</sup> To fall into such a state of belief (which will conceal itself under the guise of a state of knowledge) has disastrous results. The hazard of bearing the shield is that one all too easily becomes enthralled by its claim to invulnerability. One becomes increasingly less sensitive to changes in context and one is therefore increasingly less prepared for the inevitable collapse of that façade. Machiavelli makes a strikingly similar point when he discusses fortresses in *The Prince*.<sup>261</sup> The one who bears the shield runs the risk of trusting in its claim of invulnerability, just as a Prince runs a risk of trusting too much in fortresses to secure his kingdom in all circumstances.

I would therefore praise the one who erects fortresses and the one who does not, and would blame any one who, trusting in them, reckons little of being hated by his people.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> The warning resides as much in the cruelty of Odysseus as in the fate of Neoptolemus, or even that of Achilles himself.

<sup>260</sup> Echoes of the seeming paradox of this position can be found in the existentialist observation that if you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice. *Poiesis* concealing itself does not nullify the power of *poiesis*, but rather confirms it.

<sup>261</sup> The reading deployed here draws on the insights of R.B.J. Walker, who reads the tradition of Realism against itself. See R.B.J. Walker, “*The Prince* and “the Pauper”: Tradition, Modernity, and Practice in the Theory of International Relations,” in *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics*, ed. James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro, *Issues in World Politics* (New York: Lexington Books, 1989).

<sup>262</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Luigi Ricci, *Signet Classic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.109.

Homer does not so simply provide a readily identifiable “thus it is” despite Plato’s treatment of him in *The Republic*.<sup>263</sup> Once again, it is Odysseus who helps us see this. Upon his return to Ithaca after numerous forestallings and postponements, Odysseus weaves a series of stories about himself that have come to be called the Cretan tales. These stories are intertwined in that in each of them Odysseus presents himself as being from Crete. Barbara Clayton offers a telling and detailed account of these tales, but the current argument will focus on a few salient points. First, as noted by W. B. Stanford the ancient world held a stereotypical view of Cretans as liars.<sup>264</sup> Second, each of these tales is careful to avoid any reference to the more fantastical (and in this sense “mythological”) episodes of his travels. Absent are references to cyclopes, monsters, concubinage with goddesses, mystical conversations with the spirits of the dead. Instead there is reference to pirates, ill-fated military campaigns, foul weather and general bad luck of an everyday sort, albeit to a heightened degree. In these ways the Cretan tales are, at least to the modern reader, more believable than the “real” encounters the hero endures in the epic.

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<sup>263</sup> Neither, for that matter, does Plato maintain as unshakable a “thus it is” claim in his later works as he does in *The Republic*. For example, in the the *Laws*, imagining a situation in which tragedians are requesting admittance to the city, the Athenian states:

Most honored guests, we’re tragedians ourselves, and our tragedy is the finest and best we can create. At any rate, our entire state has been constructed so as to be a “representation” of the finest and noblest life – the very thing we maintain is most genuinely a tragedy. So we are poets like yourselves, composing in the same *genre*. Plato, “Laws,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 817b.

<sup>264</sup> Stanford cites the Cretan poet Epimenides as well as Paul’s letter to Titus 1.12-13 which reads “One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, the Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness it true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.” W.B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer* (London: MacMillan, 1959) p.209.

The sheer believability of these tales (which are self avowed falsehoods) has an unsettling effect. The Cretan tales can only be deemed falsehoods against the backdrop of the (far less believable) retelling of Odysseus' other experiences. The only assurance we have of the "truth" of these other experiences is the assurance of Homer that the latter Cretan tales are lies. The illogical trumps the logical, the true/false pairing is inverted, or rather suspended.

The suspension of the true/false pairing works to profoundly shake the reader's certainty in the "true identity" of Odysseus. The reader suspects, in other words, that perhaps the entire epic is a grand and complex Cretan tale. Consider that each of the episodes retold in the *Odyssey* revolves around the question "Who is Odysseus?" Furthermore, each episode provides a different answer, and often more than one. The epic poses a question that can only be answered by means of the very events, or non-events as the case may be, that pose the question in the first place. It is quite possible that given Odysseus' reputation as a master of deception, it is the Cretan tales of the second half of the epic, and not the fanciful ("mythological") ones of the first half that reveal the bulk of what "really" happened to him. There is simply no standpoint from which to conclusively tell. With the Cretan tales the reader is faced with Odysseus's statement "I hail from Crete's broad land, I am proud to say." (13:228) The audience (which includes the reader) is in effect faced with a known liar making the statement "I am a liar." Hence a paradox. Is Odysseus' statement true or false? The problem is entirely self-referential, and therefore perpetually unsettled.

Given that Odysseus is renowned as a shrewd tactician, a crafty opportunist, and an accomplished liar it is easy to see how he would garner considerable disdain from the perspective of the avowedly *philo-sophic* Plato. Yet Odysseus is a much more complex and problematic figure than this simplistic portrayal of him. Plato struggles with this in the *Lesser Hippias*. In that dialogue, Socrates questions Hippias's portrayal of Achilles as the "best and bravest"<sup>265</sup> as well as the most "truthful and simple"<sup>266</sup> of the Greeks, where Odysseus is "wily and a liar."<sup>267</sup> Socrates does not dispute Odysseus' status as a liar, but argues that because he lies voluntarily, he has the better soul than Achilles who does so involuntarily. Socrates argues that Odysseus must know the truth if he is to voluntarily distort it. Achilles on the other hand has a worthless soul as he has no knowledge about the truth whatsoever, much like the bad runner who runs slowly not because he chooses to but because he is incapable of doing otherwise.<sup>268</sup> The character of Odysseus tends to disturb easy categorization as true or false, good or bad. Simple logocentrism such as these are revealed as highly inadequate in his case.

### The Homeric Question

One consequence of the instability of the identity of Odysseus is a corresponding instability in any answer to the question "Where does Odysseus stand?" "What is Odysseus' position?" Or even "What does Odysseus mean?" Authors such as Clayton,

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<sup>265</sup> Plato, "Lesser Hippias," 364c.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 365b.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 373d.



Casey, Lampert and Nagy, even Plato himself, have tended to equate Homer and Odysseus.<sup>269</sup> Evidence for this conclusion is drawn from the clear favouritism granted Odysseus by the bard. The connection between the two is not only drawn from this favouritism, but from their shared polymetric and polytropic qualities.<sup>270</sup> Indeed, the connection between the two is made by Homer himself when, for example, in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, Alcionus clearly identifies Odysseus as a bard:

What grace you give your words, and what good sense within!  
You have told your story with all a singer's skill.<sup>271</sup>

The question of Homer's identity is not a new one. It was vexing even to the ancients.<sup>272</sup> Yet Plato's dismissal of Homer in *The Republic* is notably unconcerned with this

<sup>269</sup> Gerard Casey, "The Shield of Achilles," *Studies In Comparative Religion* 10, no. 2 (1976), Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's Odyssey*, Laurence Lampert, "Socrates' Defence of Polytropic Odysseus: Lying and Wrong-Doing in Plato's Lesser Hippias," *Review of Politics* 64, no. 2 (2002), Nagy, *Homeric Questions*.

<sup>270</sup> Lampert is most forward about this:

Plato's *Lesser Hippias* suggests that insight into the imperial project on behalf of philosophy can be aided by indefatigably questioning Homer and reflecting on who is the better man in Homer, straight Achilles or polytropic Odysseus. Because Odysseus is better, because Odysseus's polytropism makes possible the fall of Ilium and his own homecoming, an inference suggests itself about Homer: the great success of the educator of Hellas derives from his own capacity and knowledge, his wise "injustice" and "wrong-doing" able to create the gods and heroes imitation of whom helped forge the singular Hellenic people. Homer's greatness peaks in his polytropic capacity to create the shared horizon of heroic contest and surpassing within which Greek achievement rose to unparalleled heights.

The best man in Homer is Homer.

Lampert, "Socrates' Defence of Polytropic Odysseus: Lying and Wrong-Doing in Plato's Lesser Hippias."

<sup>271</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey* 11.416-17.

question. Plato is dismissive of Homer because Homer is logically inconsistent. According to Plato, at least as his arguments play out in *The Republic*, the messages of the works attributed to Homer do not coincide with that which reason tells us must be true. Plato's dismissal of Homer is based on the premise that the Socratic, dialectical logic Plato himself champions always already applied. Homer is thus open to criticism and dismissal because he has failed to meet the stringent demands of this logic. Plato can therefore say that the content of Homer's "thus it is" is flawed. It does not even come across as a possibility that Homer might be doing something other than making a "thus it is" claim.

This latter possibility is taken up in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. In his 1869 Inaugural Address at Basle University, Nietzsche takes up the "Homeric question" explicitly. The gist of Nietzsche's approach is that Homer cannot be unproblematically identified as a person to whom one might ascribe a certain and fathomable standpoint. Nietzsche sees Homer as problematic not because his contradictions indicate an untenable standpoint – a fatally flawed "thus it is" – but because his contradictions render it exceedingly difficult, and perhaps impossible, to attribute any standpoint to him, *once and for all*. The Homeric question indicates a problem with the making of "thus it is" claims.

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<sup>272</sup> James I. Porter, "Nietzsche, Homer, and the Classical Tradition," in *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*, ed. Paul Bishop (Rochester: Camden House, 2004), pp.10-11.

Nietzsche traces the history of the Homeric question back through Friedrich A. Wolf<sup>273</sup> to the "Alexandrian Grammarians" who "conceived the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as the creations of *one single* Homer,"<sup>274</sup> then to Aristotle who "considered Homer as the author of the original of all comic epics, the *Margites*."<sup>275</sup>

If we go still further backwards from Aristotle, the inability to create a personality is seen to increase; more and more poems are attributed to Homer; and every period lets us see its degree of criticism by how much and what it considers as Homeric. In this backward examination, we instinctively feel that away beyond Herodotus there lies a period in which an immense flood of great epics has been identified with the name of Homer.<sup>276</sup>

Based on this early and rudimentary genealogy, and given the centralizing force within the conglomeration of Greek identity exerted by Homer, Nietzsche raises the question "*Was the person created out of a conception, or the conception out of a person?*" This is the real 'Homeric question,' the central problem of the personality."<sup>277</sup> This problem cannot be easily resolved "from the standpoint of the poems themselves which

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<sup>273</sup> Wolf argued that the Homeric epics were the end result of a long oral tradition of composition and compilation. See F. A. Wolf et al., *Prolegomena to Homer* (1795) (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>274</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, "Homer and Classical Philology," in *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, ed. Oscar Levy (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1924), p.152.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., p.155.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid. Nietzsche's choice of words indicates that the "Homeric question" is a problem of "the personality" in general, not just that of the bard.

have come down to us.”<sup>278</sup> Nietzsche says that it “costs us some trouble to obtain a clear impression of that wonderful problem which, like a coin long passed from hand to hand, has lost its original and highly conspicuous stamp.”<sup>279</sup> The wide diffusion (and dissolution) of the available evidence and the absence of any unimpeachable vantage point from which to sift through it leads Nietzsche to say that “Homer as the composer of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is not a historical tradition, but an aesthetic judgment.”<sup>280</sup>

It is not that Nietzsche sees Homer alone as an aesthetic judgment but, as is detailed in much of his later work, he sees all of existence, *life itself* this way. Nietzsche does see in Homer an emphasis on “artfulness above all else,” but rather than rejecting this as somehow removed from the truth, he celebrates it. For Nietzsche

[one] feels ashamed and fearful before the Greeks: unless one respects truth in all things and so also dares to admit to oneself that the Greeks as charioteers hold the reins of our and every other culture in their hands, but that almost always the chariot and horses are too slight and frail to live up to the glory of their drivers, who then consider it a jest to spur such a team into the abyss: while they themselves jump to safety with a leap of Achilles.<sup>281</sup>

There is no question that the Greek ways of understanding the world have had a profound impact on the development of all subsequent cultures. “Almost every period and stage of cultural development has at one time or another with profound moroseness sought to free

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., p.156.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., p.163.

<sup>281</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 81. Hereafter *BT*.



itself from the Greeks.”<sup>282</sup> In Plato’s case, this would seem to apply to the Greeks themselves. The Socratic dialectics he champions as a reaction to the influence of the “imitative poets” is such an attempt, albeit a tremendously powerful one. It has already been shown that that Plato works to uncover all that is hidden, to know all that is to be known, to contemplate the Good. For in his framework, “knowledge is virtue.” This has come over time to be intimately linked with the project of the Enlightenment and in the influential work of the likes of Kant, Hegel and Marx, not to mention its centrality in the development of the tools of scientific inquiry. It is not difficult to see how many “advances” have been made possible by the operation of this framework and the ever expanding spheres of knowledge it makes possible. This is the logic of the shield and its claim “thus it is” which must presuppose the fathomability of life in order to present its depths. But Nietzsche sees a problem.

By attacking the poets in *The Republic*, Plato is reacting to what he sees as the ill effects of “artfulness above all else.” His dialectical methods are intended to dispel the representation, to uncover that which is behind them. However, in the quest for perfect knowledge, there comes a point where

science, spurred on by its powerful delusion, hurtles inexorably towards its limits where the optimism hidden in the essence of logic founders. For the periphery of the circle of science has an infinite number of points and while there is no telling yet how the circle could ever be fully surveyed, the noble and gifted man, before he has reached the middle of his life, still inevitably encounters such peripheral limit points and finds himself staring into an impenetrable darkness. If he at that moment sees to his horror how in these limits logic coils around itself and finally bites its own tail – then this new form of knowledge breaks through, *tragic knowledge*, which in order to be tolerated, needs art as a protection and remedy.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid. pp.80-81.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid. p.84.

What Nietzsche points out is that the unfathomability of art, its illusion and mystery, are required, even by science that self-avowedly seeks to dispel such things. The whole of human cultural development, he tells us, is best understood not as a dialectical operation in which a thesis and its antithesis are both overcome in a linearly progressive synthesis, but in terms of the interminable tensions between what he calls the Apollonian and Dionysian drives.

Apollo, god of the sun and of reason, is "the apotheosis of the *principium individuationis*" and its central imperatives "know thyself" and "nothing in excess."<sup>284</sup>

He is the god of dreams.

He shows us with sublime gestures how the whole world of torment is necessary in order to force the individual to produce the vision and then to sit in calm contemplation of it as his small boat is tossed by the surrounding sea.<sup>285</sup>

His counterpart is Dionysus, the god of intoxication. Where Apollo demands moderation, Dionysus is celebrated in the excess. Apollo's linearity, his orderliness, is met with the unrestrained exuberance and cyclical nature of the god whose ritualistic

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid. p.31.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid. It is not surprising then to find a representation of the sun at the centre of the shield of Achilles. Extrapolating, Nietzsche is arguing here that the entirety of the edifice in all its order and aesthetic magnificence is Apollonian, at least up to the outer rim which depicts the Ocean River surrounding all. One can easily see the shield itself as this "small boat tossed by the surrounding sea." This image also lends weight to the significance of the sea in the tale of Odysseus. The *Iliad* is a land based epic. Landmarks are readily available. The lines of conflict are clear. It is a world that can quite readily sustain the "thus it is" claim of the shield. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, is ocean based. There is a conspicuous absence of landmarks, and safe harbours are few and far between. It does not describe a world where the simple "thus it is" of the shield can maintain itself as unquestionable.

celebrations end in his being torn asunder by its celebrants before he is reborn again. The *principium individuationis* is met with the complete loss of the self, in the *becoming animal* of the Dionysian celebration. Dionysus embraces both the torment and joy of life. In the words of his companion Silenus, Dionysus teaches us that “the very best of all things is completely beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best thing for you is – to meet an early death.”<sup>286</sup> In the face of this terrible knowledge, Apollo weaves his veil of dreams, that which makes life tolerable. Apollo and Dionysus are above all not opposites. Rather they rely on each other. To favor one over the other in a logocentric pairing is to invite disaster. This is the error of Socrates, the *anti-Dionysian*.<sup>287</sup>

In framing not only art, but also life itself as developing through “the duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian”<sup>288</sup> Nietzsche is subtly reminding his reader that all of the products of this developmental dynamic are to be held suspect. Apollo and Dionysus alike are closely associated with musical instruments, the lyre and the pipes, respectively. Yet both of these instruments are inventions of Hermes, the trickster, ancestor of

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid. p.27.

<sup>287</sup> In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades says “Socrates will drink whatever you put in front of him, but no one has yet seen him drunk.” He is apparently immune to intoxication as he is to fear or bloodlust in battle. It is notable that in the same breath as he establishes Socrates as “anti-Dionysian,” Alcibiades also compares him to Silenus, and calls him “quite a flute player” - the flute being the instrument most closely associated with Dionysus. What appears to be happening here is that Socrates is *supplanting* Dionysus, just as he supplants Achilles in the *Apology*. See Plato, “Symposium,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).; Plato, “Apology.”

<sup>288</sup> Nietzsche, *Bt* p.19.

Odysseus.<sup>289</sup> Hermes was the messenger of the gods who swore upon being granted this office by his father Zeus to "never tell lies, though I cannot promise always to tell the whole truth."<sup>290</sup> Thus in both the ordered representations of the Apollonian dream and the frenzied chaos of the Dionysian intoxication there is an element of polytropism, of craftiness and deceit, of trickery. Both the *principium individuationis* and its dissolution are something less than the "whole truths" they appear to be. Both Apollo and Dionysus, as Nietzsche makes abundantly clear, require the other in a constant making and unmaking of claims to show the world "as it is." The error of the anti-Dionysian Socrates, as Nietzsche sees it, is that he has bought fully into what can only be, at best, a partial truth. Socrates, as portrayed by Nietzsche, has rescinded his ability to see this partial truth exposed in its partiality. What is worse is that through the writings of Plato, he has worked to make his rescission universal. This is why the question "what is Dionysian?" is so important for Nietzsche.

Nietzsche's emphasis on aesthetics reorients the framework employed by Plato. Where Plato judges Homer severely against the backdrop of dialectical logic and the transcendent Forms, in short against an ontological screen of Being, Nietzsche can say that Plato, under the tutelage of the anti-Dionysian Socrates,

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<sup>289</sup> Hermes was the father of Autolycus, whose daughter was Anticlea, wife of Laertes and mother of Odysseus.

<sup>290</sup> Graves, *The Greek Myths* p.65. The connection between the three gods is drawn closer when one takes into account that Hermes and Apollo were both associated with the art of divination, and that Hermes was the god of shepherds before that role was increasingly taken by Dionysus. Graves notes that "the Apollonian priesthood constantly trespassed on the territory of Hermes, an earlier patron of soothsaying, literature, and the arts; as did the Hermetic priesthood on that of Pan." (p.67) Pan is yet another god closely associated with Dionysus.



was obliged by full artistic necessity to create an art-form essentially related to the existing art-forms which he had rejected. The main reproach which Plato addressed to the older art – that it is the imitation of an apparent image, and so belongs to an even lower sphere [of knowledge] than the empirical world – certainly could not be directed against the new work of art: and so we see Plato's efforts to go beyond reality and to represent the idea which lies at the basis of that pseudo-reality. But in this way Plato the thinker arrived by a circuitous route at the place which had always been his home as an artist.<sup>291</sup>

This can be understood as a criticism of Plato if one abides by Plato's terms, but within Nietzsche's framework this is high praise indeed. It elevates Plato above the status of "philosophical labourers after the noble exemplar of Kant and Hegel" to that of an "actual philosopher."

*Actual philosophers...are commanders and law givers: they say "thus it shall be!", it is they who determine the Wherefore and the Whither of mankind...they reach for the future with creative hand, and everything that is or has been becomes for them a means, an instrument, a hammer. Their "knowing" is creating, their creating is law giving, their will to truth is - will to power.*<sup>292</sup>

Platonic thought is thus both a scourge and a blessing. It is a scourge in so far as it has become utterly convincing and therefore (apparently) unchallengeable, leading to a stagnation in human self-overcoming. In this guise it is hostile to life itself, which is overcoming. But it is also a blessing in that it forms a solid backdrop against which the "new philosopher" emerges, against which Nietzsche emerges.

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<sup>291</sup> Nietzsche, *Bt* p.77.

<sup>292</sup> Nietzsche, *Bge* p.211.

### Nietzsche's Language

Language is Nietzsche's bugbear. In it he sees the embodiment and perpetuation of "a tremendous error."<sup>293</sup> "Belief in...*identical* facts and in *isolated* facts – has in language its constant evangelist and advocate."<sup>294</sup> Language, as with the perception of the historical philosopher, is situated within a specific history from which it draws its meaning. The specific history of the European languages is the same history of metaphysical thought already addressed.<sup>295</sup> The words of the European languages are thus steeped in presumptions of Being.

To the extent that man has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as in *æternæ veritates* he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animal: he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world. The sculptor of language was not so modest as to believe that he was only giving things designations, he conceived rather that with the words he was expressing supreme knowledge of things.<sup>296</sup>

Nietzsche sees a direct tension between the world and the word. Names presuppose fixity, self-identity. As such they deny the constant flux of becoming. "The word *killeth*, everything fixed *killeth*."<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.16. Hereafter *HATH*.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.* p.306. See also Nietzsche, *Bge* p.50.

<sup>295</sup> Here again is the difficulty of language in the use of the word "same." This word itself carries all the presuppositions of Being Nietzsche attempts to move beyond. See Nietzsche, *Hath* p.22.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.* p.16.

<sup>297</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols; and, the Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, *Penguin Classics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) p.156. Hereafter *TI/AC*.

Change, mutation, becoming in general were formerly taken as proof of appearance, as the sign of something which led us astray. Today, on the contrary, we see ourselves as it were entangled in error, *necessitated* to error, to precisely the extent that our prejudice in favor of reason compels us to posit unity, identity, duration, substance, cause, materiality, being; however sure we may be, on the basis of a strict reckoning, *that* error is to be found here. The situation is the same as with the motions of the sun: in that case error has our eyes, in the present case our language as a perpetual advocate [...] I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar...<sup>298</sup>

Words in themselves presuppose the kind of self-identity of concepts Nietzsche rejects. To speak of life, of becoming, is to fix it as a concept. In doing so, one simultaneously denies it. The goal of the metaphysician is to uncover Being at which time no further questions or answers are necessary. The aim of the metaphysician then is to have done once and for all with the need to communicate. This may be related to the conceit of the metaphysician that in uncovering Being, he also uncovers the proper means for living in accord with it.<sup>299</sup>

Nietzsche is a metaphysician of sorts. But of what sorts? It seems contradictory to say he is a metaphysician when he describes himself as a “godless antimetaphysician.” The key to this apparent contradiction lies in the etymological origins of the word. “Metaphysics” is derived from the philosophical works of Aristotle. It literally translates as “the (works) after the physical (works)” and is a reference to those works of Aristotle

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid. p.48. There is an implication in this passage that the necessity of which Nietzsche speaks can be avoided, but doing so requires an elimination of “our prejudice in favor of reason.” It is a questioning of just that prejudice that serves as a backdrop for the argument of this dissertation.

<sup>299</sup> Some of the implications of this belief are to be found in Nietzsche, *Hath* p.216., and Nietzsche, *Bge* pp.21-23.

which follow his text entitled *Physics*.<sup>300</sup> Etymologically the word is made up of two components; the prefix “*meta-*”, meaning after, behind, or beyond, and “*physika*” or the physical. From this it has been traditionally employed as “beyond-” or “behind- the physical.” It is this notion of metaphysics with its quest for categorical knowledge, transcendental truths and eternal verities that Nietzsche has in mind when he describes himself as “anti-metaphysician.”

However, the etymological roots of the term contain an ambiguity, which justifies the claim that Nietzsche is a metaphysician of sorts.<sup>301</sup> The prefix “*meta-*” while meaning after, behind, beyond, can also be used to denote transformation, as in “*metamorphosis*.” There is thus a possible literal translation of “*metaphysics*” as “the transformation of the physical.” Furthermore “*physika*” meaning the body, is also the root of “*physician*” (doctor) and “*physic*” (prescribed remedy, cathartic). The implication here is that Nietzsche as *meta-physician* prescribes the embracing and celebration of change as a treatment for the sickness of traditional metaphysics. This variation on the traditional word emphasizes both Nietzsche’s departure from that which precedes him

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<sup>300</sup> See <http://www.m-w.com/>. Interestingly, the positional inference of this literal translation meshes quite nicely with the insistence on contextualisation inherent to Nietzsche’s “historical philosophy.”

<sup>301</sup> The ambiguity is one Nietzsche as a philologist is no doubt aware. “Philology is to be understood here in a very wide sense as the art of reading well – of being able to read off a fact *without* falsifying it by interpretation, *without* losing caution, patience, subtlety in the desire for understanding. Philology as *ephexis* in interpretation.” Nietzsche, *Ti/Ac* pp.181-82.



and his proximity to it. In calling Nietzsche a *meta-physician* his work is placed within, or rather beyond, and built upon a specific avenue of philosophical inquiry.<sup>302</sup>

The aim of the meta-physician is to somehow come to terms with becoming, knowing the impossibility of this task. Nietzsche implies that question marks and “perhapses” are unending.<sup>303</sup> As a philologist, Nietzsche is well aware of the change in the usage of words over time. Thus even if a spoken word can never capture becoming, perhaps the speaking and re-speaking of a word over long periods of time can offer insight into becoming.

It is good to repeat oneself and thus bestow on a thing a right and a left foot. Truth may be able to stand on one leg; but with two it can walk and get around.<sup>304</sup>

This last aphorism is key, and even more so when read in conjunction with one almost immediately preceding it:

*Thought in poetry.* – The poet conducts his thoughts along festively, in the carriage of rhythm: usually because they are incapable of walking on foot.<sup>305</sup>

This implies that the poet is capable of doing something the metaphysician can not. The poet can name without fixing the named as a concept in the same way. For Nietzsche,

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<sup>302</sup> In so far as he goes beyond the tradition of metaphysics, he may be called a *metametaphysician*. To avoid excessive awkwardness I will continue with the use of the term “meta-physician” to encapsulate both this and his widespread usage of the medicalised analogy.

<sup>303</sup> Nietzsche, *Bge* p.32.

<sup>304</sup> Nietzsche, *Hath* p.307.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.* p.93.

naming is clearly an art. Any act of naming is also, in so far as it is an inscription of the speaker onto the world, an artistic expression:

Even when we are involved in the most uncommon experiences we still do the same thing: we fabricate the greater part of the experience and can hardly be compelled *not* to contemplate some event as its 'inventor.' All this means: we are from the very heart and from the very first - *accustomed to lying*. Or, to express it more virtuously and hypocritically, in short more pleasantly: one is much more of an artist than one realises.<sup>306</sup>

As with all artists, metaphysicians and meta-physicians alike are dreamers.<sup>307</sup>

The differences between them are subtle, but Nietzsche has forewarned the reader of his subtlety.<sup>308</sup> He says of himself: "I suddenly woke up in the midst of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish - as a somnambulist must go on dreaming lest he fall."<sup>309</sup> The difference is that the meta-physician is aware of his own dreaming. He becomes a "somnambulist of the day."<sup>310</sup> The names this artist/philosopher/somnambulist gives emerge from his dream.<sup>311</sup>

To start from the dream: on to a certain sensation, the result for example of a distant cannon-shot, a cause is subsequently foisted (often a whole little novel in which precisely the dreamer is the chief character). The

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<sup>306</sup> Nietzsche, *Bge* p.115.

<sup>307</sup> Nietzsche has already referred to metaphysical thought as "dream thinking." Nietzsche, *Hath* p.18.

<sup>308</sup> Nietzsche, *Bge* p.59.

<sup>309</sup> Nietzsche, *Gs* p.116.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.* p.123.

<sup>311</sup> Nietzsche takes the sceptical position found in Descartes as a necessary and irreducible starting point. See Nietzsche, *Ti/Ac* p.184.

sensation, meanwhile continues to persist, as a kind of resonance: it waits, as it were, until the cause-creating drive permits it to step into the foreground – now no longer as a chance occurrence but as ‘meaning.’<sup>312</sup>

If this is the process by which words acquire meaning, then all words are inherently deceptions. Given that the metaphysician and the meta-physician alike deal in deceptions, how can the standards of life affirming and life denying be decided? How can Nietzsche give preference to one over the other?

The meta-physician, who speaks in terms of “life affirming” and “life denying” instead of “true” and “false”, perpetuates an error in speaking at all. Even called “becoming” or “will to power” life is rendered a “thing”, (“and there is no ‘thing’”).<sup>313</sup> The metaphysician however commits a double error. Not only does he render life a “thing”, but also he convinces himself of its thing-ness. He has convinced himself that the claim he makes, his “this it is,” refers to something outside of himself. Furthermore, he has convinced himself that it is something to which he (and everybody else) is beholden.

A metaphysician’s ambition to maintain a forlorn position, may actually play a part and [he may] finally prefer a handful of ‘certainty’ to a whole cartful of beautiful possibilities; there may even exist puritanical fanatics of conscience who would rather lie down and die on a sure nothing than on an uncertain something. But this is nihilism and the sign of a despairing, mortally weary soul, however brave the bearing of such a virtue may appear.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid. p.128.

<sup>313</sup> Nietzsche, *Hath* p.22.

<sup>314</sup> Nietzsche, *Bge* p.40.

Although Nietzsche continually attacks morality, he produces one himself. This is indicated in his reproof of those who would "deny life." Yet Nietzsche's moral language (his "immorality" to use his words) is structurally different than those he understands it to be supplanting. Nietzsche's (im)morality must be pronounced a "thing", but - here is the crucial difference - not a *thing*, so that further steps beyond it may be taken. It must however be taken very seriously if it is to solidify into useful material from which the future may be built. For this to happen, its originator must be convinced of its truthfulness. The meta-physician thus plays the "*the dangerous game*"<sup>315</sup> of having to believe in the truth of his convictions while at the same time having to be able to free himself from both truth and conviction.

The special contribution of Nietzsche's morality, his response to the life-affirming meta-physical challenge, is that his moral formula does not privilege a specific content. Rather it presents a privileged *method*. "The most valuable insights are the last to be discovered; but the most valuable insights are methods."<sup>316</sup> "Methods, one must repeat ten times, *are* the essential, as well as being the most difficult, as well as being that which

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid. pp.132-33.

<sup>316</sup> Nietzsche, *Ti/Ac* p.135.



has habit and laziness against it longest.”<sup>317</sup> This method, which places an emphasis on artfulness above all else, is strikingly *Odyssean*.

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid. p.194.

## CHAPTER V

### EKPHRASIS AS CRITIQUE

Nietzsche blurs the divisions between reality and imagination, between the natural and the constructed, and allows for the broad scope of life to be understood as poetic. His emphasis on the centrality of the grammarians with their insistence on the hard and fast rules of language is important in that it reveals the literary nature of experience. Nietzsche leads his reader to the point where claims like the one made by Franz Bäuml are possible:

I do contend that the tools with which one thinks affect one's thinking, that the way in which one thinks has its social consequences, and that therefore control of the tools of thought is of the utmost importance for the maintenance of power.<sup>318</sup>

But this is nothing new. It is from these same grounds that Plato launches his assault on the poets.<sup>319</sup> His use of mimesis as a critical tool adopts the strategy of Perseus as has already been said. Foremost among the shortcomings of this strategy is that it tends to leave the structural operation of the shield intact. Just as the decapitation of Medusa does nothing to diminish the power of her gaze, so too does Plato's "thus it really is" do

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<sup>318</sup> Franz H. Bäuml, "Writing the Emperor's Clothes On: Literacy and the Production of Facts," in *Written Voices, Spoken Signs: Tradition, Performance and the Epic Text*, ed. Egbert Bakker and Ahuvia Kahane (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.37. This same sentiment is to be found in the work of George Lakoff. See Lakoff, *Moral Politics*, Lakoff, *Simple Framing: An Introduction to Framing and Its Use in Politics* ([cited], Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*).

<sup>319</sup> Plato too is Odyssean (Homeric) in his artistry, although he works to conceal that artistry in *The Republic*. Nietzsche helps to expose that which is concealed.

nothing to counter the structural power of the shield's "thus it is." Likewise Baudrillard's "thus it is," even if expressed as "thus it isn't," leaves the problematic structure of a totalizing cosmos/ethos pairing intact. Mimesis, even if it is the mimesis of mimesis, remains mimesis and preserves the natural or ontological status of that which it purports to represent. It thus remains blind to the irreducibility of change. It keeps in place, and relies on "the natural sign."<sup>320</sup> The argument thus far has that no longer can mimesis be deployed as a means to evaluate claims against a fixed and fathomable backdrop of the Good, or the real, or, after Nietzsche, of Truth.<sup>321</sup>

So where does this leave us? The problem is not only the totalising and paralysing cosmological and ethical claim of the shield, which leaves its audience and its speaker alike paralysed, devoid of responsibility (response-ability), but also its oft-unintentional perpetuation. This is not a purely abstract problem, reserved for theorists and philosophers. It shows up in multiple forms, including the branding of dissent against the War on Terror as unpatriotic. It appears in the spate of suicide bombings and the targeting of civilians by extremist groups of all stripes. "This is how it really is," we are told. "There is nothing to do but see the war through to its end," we are told. And the flood of messages to this effect sinks in. The messages become believable. And so the war goes on and on. In the mathematics of such thinking, 138 becomes

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<sup>320</sup> The term is taken from Murray Krieger, and will be discussed in some detail below. See Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

<sup>321</sup> The capitalisation here is intended to indicate its transcendent status as something beyond the reach of both spatial and temporal contextualization.

2000 becomes 10,000.<sup>322</sup> So the question remains: how does one resist the power of the shield?

### From Perseus to Paris

Perseus defeats Medusa by means of a mimetic approach. He uses the reflective surface of Athena's shield to distance himself from the Gorgon's gaze. His victory is completed – it congeals as a victory – in the abdication of his new power, Medusa's gaze. Recognizing its power as too great to be wielded by a mortal, he relinquishes it to Athena for safekeeping. But Nietzsche has told us "God is dead!"<sup>323</sup> Not only is Perseus' abdication of this power a truly heroic act, beyond the horizon of ordinary human beings, but there remains no divine locus of responsibility to which such a power might be abdicated. There is an irony then in the observation that it is exactly those groups who insist on the presence of such a divine centre, be they "Christian," or "Muslim," or "Jewish," who are the most *incapable* of relinquishing this power. The scare quotes are self-consciously employed, as there is some question as to the theological credentials of some of the groups currently bearing the shield. President Bush spoke of al Qaeda as promoting a form of Islam so distorted that it can hardly be called Islamic.<sup>324</sup> Yet the same kinds of arguments can be applied to President Bush's

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<sup>322</sup> These numbers being in reference to the total American war dead in Iraq. 138 prior to President Bush's declaration of victory and a cessation of major combat operations, 2000 at the time of this writing some two and a half years later. The figures say nothing of the tens of thousands of Iraqi citizens killed.

<sup>323</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* p.12.

<sup>324</sup> For a similar assessment, see Barry Cooper, "Why the Koran Matters in Understanding Jihadist Terrorists" (paper presented at the Terrorism, Democracy and



own form of Christianity. Heroism, as exemplified in the actions of Achilles, Odysseus, and Perseus involves a setting aside of the shield. It is ironic that those contemporary groups most prone to cloak themselves in the garb of heroism are often the most pronounced bearers of the shield. Clearly another tactical approach is required.

One can be found in Paris: Paris the archer, son of Priam and Prince of Troy: Paris who neither bears the shield nor is paralyzed by it.<sup>325</sup> Paris the archer is not stunned into inaction by the shield precisely because he never directly faces it. As an archer, his weapon only operates when he stands at the margins of the battle. Following the clues left by Plato's use of mimetic poetry against itself, by Nietzsche's linguistic turn, and by Derrida's deconstructive techniques of reading a text from its margins, it is advisable that one treat the shield of Achilles as a literary construct, which, obviously, it is. By extension it is advisable that one treat every instance of the bearing of the shield as a literary construct, subject to textual criticism. For it is literary criticism that offers up a tool most useful for the critical theorist faced with an instance of the bearing of the shield.

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Empire, Carleton University, October 1 2005). Cooper makes use of what he calls "pneumopathology" (soul sickness) to describe the condition in which one justifies one's actions based on what one knows to be a lie. At first glance this position may seem indistinguishable from that of Odysseus, but there are very important differences. The concept of "pneumopathology" as deployed by Cooper marks a very clear distinction between the true and the false. As presented, the concept notes "their" sickness and "our" health. As such, it is radically non-Odyssean for the simple reason that it ignores the destabilisation of the categories of true and false occasioned by the character of Odysseus.

<sup>325</sup> But also Paris the home of the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Science Sociales* and Jacques Derrida, not to mention Paris as the seat of government of the country foremost among those opposed to the war in Iraq, and hence a symbol of resistance.

Erich Auerbach makes headway along this road in his use of mimesis as a comparative tool.<sup>326</sup> By setting multiple examples of life-like representation side by side, each quite different from the others, Auerbach calls into question not only the beliefs or capacities of the audience that accepts these representations, but also that which is being represented. If it is granted that each instance is life-like and an accurate and believable representation of the world, then not only is the comparison a comment on the developing ways of understanding the world, but it is also a comment on the world itself. What kind of a world is this that it can be represented in so many, sometimes incompatible ways? It is certainly not the kind of a world about which a simple "thus it is" statement can be made once and for all. Hence it is not the kind of world that can easily sustain a simple ethos of "nothing to be done about it." This is obviously not to say that such claims *are not* made, and enforced. Nor is it to say that such claims *cannot* be made. It is to say that if they are made (and they are), they cannot be as unchallengeable as they claim themselves to be. Mimesis can give these insights, but has difficulty maintaining this perspective unless deployed comparatively across a number of different cases. But what if only a single case is available? Is there a way to retain these insights? Indeed there is. This tool is not mimesis, but *ekphrasis*.

### **Krieger: The Still Mo(ve)ment of Ekphrasis**

Ekphrasis has an original meaning of "to tell in full."<sup>327</sup> It has come to refer to the representation of art in poetry, and its archetypical example is Homer's description

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<sup>326</sup> See Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*.

<sup>327</sup> Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* p.7.

of the shield of Achilles in Book 18 of the *Iliad*. Although a relatively obscure and minor genre, ekphrasis has proven remarkably long-lived. In an attempt to unify the multitude of examples of ekphrasis from Homer and Virgil to Keats and Auden, James Heffernan defines ekphrasis as “*the verbal representation of visual representation*.”<sup>328</sup> It is from a slight but important modification of this definition that the argument will proceed. W.J.T. Mitchell notes, “from the semantic point of view, from the standpoint of referring, expressing intensions and producing effects in a viewer/listener [audience], there is no essential difference between texts and images.”<sup>329</sup> If this is the case, then from a semantic point of view neither is there a difference between visual and tactile representation. Following this implication, I propose to expand the definition to ekphrasis by de-emphasising “*visual representation*” in favor of “*non-verbal representation*.” Hence the definition of ekphrasis is amended to be “the verbal representation of non-verbal representation.” This would appear to be paradoxical, since by the logic of Mitchell’s argument and its semantic point of view, there is no non-verbal representation. For the time being this problem will be postponed, but it will be taken up again in the discussion of the operation and destabilizing effects of ekphrasis.

Ekphrasis is a powerful disturber of what Murray Krieger calls “the natural-sign aesthetic.”<sup>330</sup> The natural-sign is that in which there is a certain, direct, non-arbitrary

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<sup>328</sup> James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words : The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) p.3.

<sup>329</sup> Mitchell, *Ekphrasis and the Other* ([cited]).

<sup>330</sup> Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* p.7.

relationship between the signifier and the signified. The natural-sign is the holy grail of Nietzsche's grammarians. It underlies the position of Cratylus in Plato's dialogue that bears his name. Krieger argues:

Our semiotic desire for the natural-sign is a reflection of our ontological yearning: our anxiety to find an order or structure objectively, "naturally," "out there" – beyond society as well as ourselves – that would authorise the signs and forms that our subjectivity projects and that we then want – nay, require – others to respond to and acknowledge as being there. It is an anxiety exploited by all holders of power and bearers of doctrines that they seek to impose through a claim to a natural authority. This attempted imposition so often succeeds because it meets and satisfies our semiotic desire for the natural-sign, as it confers the special privilege of nature upon the conventional – and arbitrary – signs dictated by various motives, most of them politically suspect.<sup>331</sup>

As should now be obvious, the natural-sign aesthetic underlies the power of the shield. Its "thus it is" aspires to the status of the natural-sign, and it is in the garb of the natural-sign that it is presented by its bearer.

Ekphrasis disturbs the natural-sign aesthetic by imposing multiple layers of representation between the reader/audience and that which is represented. Where mimesis works both to represent and to conceal itself as a representation – to "tell it like it is" – ekphrasis constantly reminds the reader/audience of its status as a representation. What is more, it openly displays itself as a representation of a representation. This distance from the object being represented, if one can rightly call it that, leads Plato to the wholesale rejection of poetry – at least on an ostensible level. But if one does not place this doubly distant representation against the backdrop of a fixed object "out there" then ironically enough, the ekphrastic representation "corresponds" more closely

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid. p.237.



to a reality which is not representable in its totality (or perhaps at all). The ekphrastic image is a *natural-like-sign* of an unrepresentable referent in that it is a reminder of the contingency and artificiality of the natural-sign.

Ekphrasis leaves us in very much the same situation as does Derrida's encounter with a fragment left by Nietzsche:

"I have forgotten my umbrella."<sup>332</sup>

Derrida notes in this short line of text a radical and irreducible inaccessibility. It may or may not have "some hidden secret,"<sup>333</sup> and what is more:

To whatever lengths one might carry a conscientious interpretation, the hypothesis that the totality of Nietzsche's text, in some monstrous way, might well be of the type "I have forgotten my umbrella" cannot be denied.

Which is tantamount to saying that there is no "totality to Nietzsche's text," not even a fragmentary or aphoristic one.<sup>334</sup>

This is not to say that because this possibility cannot be denied, that another possibility, namely that there *is* "some hidden secret" must be denied. For that would be an extreme form of relativism and nihilism. (This is the pitfall that claims Baudrillard.) It is just that one cannot tell. Both possibilities must remain, hence "the text remains

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<sup>332</sup> Nietzsche quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles / Eperons: Les Styles De Nietzsche*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) p.123.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid. p.125.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid. pp.133-35.

closed, at once open and closed, or each in turn, folded/unfolded (*ployé/déployé*), it is just an umbrella that you couldn't use (*dont vous n'auriez pas l'emploi*).<sup>335</sup>

Ekphrasis disturbs the natural-sign, but it does not eradicate it entirely. Rather it renders explicit the difficulties of making a "thus it is" (hence also a "nothing to be done") claim.

What we call "nature" thus comes more and more to be deconstructed into a mirror of our own historically conditioned selves, of our desires, and of our desire to validate those desires by grounding them in what we claim to be an objective nature out there...

Once nature is thus relativised, so that it loses its ontological grounding, it can of course serve no longer as the fixed referent for a natural sign. And the natural sign, no longer authorised, will be consigned to the realm of myth and will give way to the acknowledgement of the conventional character of all signs.<sup>336</sup>

The disruptive features of ekphrasis are self reflexive as well. Ekphrasis by its very definition operates on the contested borderlines between "the Sister Arts" of poetry and plastic media such as painting or sculpture. It disrupts the clean provincialities of Gotthold Lessing who insisted that the proper domain of art is space, while the proper

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid. p.137. There is an intriguing connection between Derrida's observation, (immediately preceding the lines quoted), that "there is dissimulation only if one tells the truth, only if one tells that one is telling the truth," and the scene in which Homer tells of Odysseus' encounter with Athena upon his return to Ithaca. Notably, it is only after Athena drops her disguise and reveals herself to Odysseus that the hero doubts her: you're mocking me, I know it, telling me tales to make me lose my way. Tell me the truth now, have I really reached the land I love? Homer, *The Odyssey* (13:371-73). Odysseus is in this way less dubious of the disguise than he is of the truth it supposes to conceal. For a detailed discussion of this scene, see Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's Odyssey*.

<sup>336</sup> Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* pp.251-52.

domain of poetry is time.<sup>337</sup> It even appears to disturb any clear-cut and final delineation of its own purpose or intent. Krieger has pointed to the ekphrastic principle, which in the circular form of the poem “must convert the transparency of its verbal medium into the physical solidity of the medium of the spatial arts.”<sup>338</sup> Thus ekphrasis effects a “total mastery of moving life, the capturing of it in a ‘still’ pattern.”<sup>339</sup> But this is not “still life” as in *nature morte*. Krieger uses the term “still” in a much different way:

[He has] freely used it as an adjective, adverb and verb; as still movement, still moving, and more forcefully, the stilling of movement: so “still” movement as quiet, unmoving movement; “still” moving as a forever-now movement, an action that is at once the quieting of movement and the perpetuation of it, the making of it, like Eliot’s wheel and Chinese jar, a movement that is still and that is still with us, that is – in his words – “forever still.”<sup>340</sup>

### Mitchell: Ekphrastic Hope

Krieger’s “stilling” expresses a subtle and difficult feature of ekphrasis, namely its simultaneous freezing and perpetuation of motion. This point is difficult in that it is all too easy to ignore the latter half of its function. It is all too easy to read Krieger, as W.J.T. Mitchell does, as propagating an understanding of ekphrasis that is akin to Nietzsche’s understanding of the name. Nietzsche held that the name worked to fix,

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<sup>337</sup> G.E. Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

<sup>338</sup> Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* p.266.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.* p.267.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.* p.268.

and therefore to kill, that which it names. “The word *killeth*, everything fixed *killeth*.”<sup>341</sup> Mitchell is critical of Krieger precisely because Mitchell takes the “stilling” of ekphrasis to refer to its “descriptive ‘arresting of movement.’”<sup>342</sup> In the context of a discussion of Shelly’s poem “On the Medusa of Leonardo DaVinci in the Florentine Gallery” Mitchell states, “if the poet’s ekphrastic hopes were fulfilled, the reader would be similarly transfixed, unable to read or hear.”<sup>343</sup>

Mitchell sees ekphrasis as having “three phases or moments of realization. The first might be called ‘ekphrastic indifference,’ and it grows out of a commonsense perception that ekphrasis is impossible.”<sup>344</sup> This is to say that if ekphrasis is “the verbal representation of a visual representation” then it can never fully complete its task. Language, no matter how detailed, cannot bring the visual presence of a visual representation before us.<sup>345</sup> Homer’s description of the shield of Achilles, for example, can never make it as present for his audience in the same way it would be present for those on the battlefield of Troy. In the same way, a news report, however in-depth, cannot place its audience in the situation being reported on in the same way as actually

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<sup>341</sup> Nietzsche, *Ti/Ac* p.156.

<sup>342</sup> Mitchell, *Ekphrasis and the Other* ([cited]).

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.([cited]).

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.([cited]).

<sup>345</sup> One may suggest that typographical portraits are an exception. But in these cases it is more the shading and density of the physical medium of the text that is responsible for the image rather than the text itself. It serves my point - and Mitchell’s for that matter - that such portraiture would not have the same effect if read aloud. For examples of such portraiture, see [http://ni9e.com/typo\\_illus.html](http://ni9e.com/typo_illus.html)



being there. The description in short always remains a description, and not the object described.

The second phase of ekphrasis, called “ekphrastic hope” by Mitchell, comes “when the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination or metaphor, when we discover a ‘sense’ in which language can do what so many writers have wanted it to do: ‘to make us see.’”<sup>346</sup> This phase sees the dissolution of the obscurity of ekphrasis. It ceases to be something out of the ordinary and “begins to seem paradigmatic of a fundamental tendency in all linguistic expression.”<sup>347</sup> The greatest hope of this phase is that a kind of dialectically synthetic closure will be obtained in the rise of the “verbal icon or imagetext.”<sup>348</sup> It is at this stage that Mitchell places Krieger, although wrongly so, for reasons discussed below.

The third phase closely follows on the second. “This is the moment of resistance or counterdesire that occurs when we sense that the difference between the verbal and visual representation might collapse and the figurative, imaginary desire of ekphrasis might be realized literally and actually.”<sup>349</sup> This is “ekphrastic fear.” According to Mitchell, ekphrastic fear highlights “the difference between verbal and visual mediation [as] a moral, aesthetic imperative rather than (as in the first

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<sup>346</sup> Mitchell, *Ekphrasis and the Other* ([cited]).

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.([cited]).

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.([cited]).

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.([cited]).

'indifferent' phase of ekphrasis) a natural fact that can be relied on."<sup>350</sup> Mitchell sees this phase as being quite widespread.

It would be easy to show its place in a wide range of literary theorizing, from the Marxist hostility to modernist experiments with literary space, to deconstructionist efforts to overcome "formalism" and "closure," to the anxieties of Protestant poetics with the temptations of "imagery," to the romantic tradition's obsession with a poetics of voice, invisibility, and blindness. All the goals of "ekphrastic hope," of achieving vision, iconicity, or a "still moment" of plastic presence through language become, from this point of view, sinister and dangerous.<sup>351</sup>

The main aim of ekphrastic fear is to undo the veiled threat of ekphrastic hope. It is to expose the notion of the imagetext as a "deceitful illusion, a magical technique that threatens to fixate the poet and the listener."<sup>352</sup>

These three phases centre on ekphrastic hope, which, as has been noted, rests on a misreading of Krieger's "still moment." This is not to say that Mitchell's architecture is to be disposed of entirely. He is quite correct to emphasize the destabilizing effects ekphrasis and its inherent ambiguity. This ambiguity is evident in the very phases of ekphrasis, even if there is an issue to be taken with Mitchell's nomenclature. It is not the case that each phase follows as a consequence of another, but rather that each phase is simultaneous with the others. It is part and parcel of ekphrasis to be impossible, hopeful and fearful all at once.

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid.([cited]). Mitchell calls attention to Lessing who argued that poetry and the plastic arts (painting is his favoured example) should operate in mutually exclusive spheres rather than allow poetry to "employ the same artistic machinery" as the painter, thereby "convert[ing] a superior being into a doll." See Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*.

<sup>351</sup> Mitchell, *Ekphrasis and the Other* ([cited]).

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.([cited]).

The problem is that Mitchell tends to equate Krieger's ekphrasis with what he calls ekphrastic hope. In doing this, he runs the risk of glossing over much of its unsettling operation, its ability to upset, to render the obvious difficult, and to make the simple problematic. Mitchell is quite right to place such an emphasis on ekphrasis as resistant to "placement," not only in regards to its object, but also in its own operation. That is, ekphrasis disturbs the naïve realist notion, the "natural sign aesthetic," by being doubly removed from its "object" as a representation of a representation.<sup>353</sup> At the same time ekphrasis is self-referentially disruptive. It disturbs its own operation as "a minor and relatively obscure literary genre" and "paradigmatic of a fundamental tendency in all linguistic expression."<sup>354</sup> Simultaneously ekphrasis is "an ornament to epic," (following Lessing's description), and epic is an ornament to ekphrasis.

If Lessing could have seen the subsequent development of Homeric criticism, he would have found his worst fears justified. Not only did ekphrasis establish itself firmly as a distinct poetic genre, but the great prototype of Achilles' shield seems, in the work of modern classical scholarship imbued with assumptions of formalism, to have established a kind of dominance over the epic of which it is supposed to be a mere ornament... Indeed, the shield (and ekphrastic hope along with it) may have even more grandiose aspiration than this synecdochical representation of the whole in the part, for the shield presents much more of Homer's world than the *Iliad* does. The entire universe is depicted on the shield... the entire action of the *Iliad* becomes a fragment in the totalizing vision provided by Achilles' shield.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> There is not even a guarantee that this "object" even has an independent existence outside of its linguistic representation, as the shield of Achilles so readily exemplifies.

<sup>354</sup> Mitchell, *Ekphrasis and the Other* ([cited]).

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.* ([cited]).

Mitchell says "ekphrasis resists 'placement' as an ornamental feature of larger textual structures, or as a minor genre. It aims to be all of literature in miniature."<sup>356</sup> But this is only partly right. His misreading of Krieger leads him to gloss over the equally pronounced resistance of ekphrasis to being "all of literature in miniature." Krieger's "still moment" shows that it adopts and resists both roles at once, generating an irreducible and irresolvable tension.

### **Becker: Breaking the Illusion**

The disruptive power of ekphrasis extends the same promise of critical distance that could not be followed through by mimesis. It remains to be seen if ekphrasis can follow through on this promise. One hopeful sign is noted very early on in Andrew Sprague Becker's survey of the history of ekphrasis. He notes

a double movement of literary representation in ekphrasis: acceptance of the illusion proposed by the ekphrasis is accompanied by a complementary breaking of that illusion. The phrase "breaking the illusion" carries, here, a rather mild sense; it indicates that a certain self-consciousness expressed in the description adds another dimension, perhaps unsettling the illusion, or balancing it, or bracketing it. The illusion is still in play, but it is held a bit more lightly and with an acknowledgement of its irony.<sup>357</sup>

Becker not only delineates that ekphrasis accomplishes this feat, but also outlines the way in which it is accomplished. He details four levels of representation to which ekphrasis calls attention. These are:

*Res Ipsae* – Referent.

*Opus Ipsum* – A focus on the physical medium.

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid.([cited]).

<sup>357</sup> Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis* p.23.



*Artifex et Ars* – a focus on the creator and the creation of the work of art and their relation to the medium and the referent.

*Animadversor*- A focus on the effect of or reaction to the work of visual art.<sup>358</sup>

It is through the interplay of these levels of representation that ekphrasis both sustains and disrupts the mimetic illusion. It is possible to utilize this “terministic screen”<sup>359</sup> to offer a critical perspective on a significant range of political pronouncements, including the rhetoric coming from the Bush Administration concerning the War on Terror. However, before reaching that end, the contours of this “terministic screen” should be more carefully laid out.

The *res ipsae* or referent is the mimetic level of representation and it is “based upon the recognition and elaboration of what is depicted by the image.”<sup>360</sup> Under the rubric of the *res ipsae* “the subject matter is often turned into a small story.”<sup>361</sup> As a mimetic representation, there is in this phase an establishment of the object. That which lies behind any representation is brought to the fore. This phase has three subdivisions; naming, interpreting and dramatizing. The name fixes the object, interpretation endows it with meaning, and dramatization sets the object in motion. Working in conjunction, the three serve to create a mimetic illusion; a presentation of (the image of) the object

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid, pp.42-43.

<sup>359</sup> Becker quotes Kenneth Burke as saying “Pick some particular nomenclature, some one terministic screen...that you may proceed to track down the kinds of observation implicit in the terminology you have chosen...[A] given terminology coaches us to look for certain kinds of things rather than others... Some terminologies contain much richer modes of observation than others.” Ibid. p.43n79.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid. p.42.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

before the mind's eye. The phrase "the image of" is bracketed here because although all that is presented is an image, part of the power of that image is to conceal itself as an image. Hence "the surface of the work becomes a transparent window to the scene evoked therein."<sup>362</sup> Thus in the *Iliad* the *res ipsae* is discernable in Homer's tendency to "forget that he is representing graphic art; he suppresses all reference to metal as he tells the gruesome story of the lions and the ox."<sup>363</sup> The hazards of this "forgetting," if left unchecked, have already been discussed in the terms of the tendency of mimesis to conceal itself and thus to perpetuate the bearing of the shield.

Fortunately, ekphrasis builds into itself several checks on this "forgetting." One of these is the *opus ipsum*. Here the focus is not the perpetuation of an illusion through its dramatization. Instead there is an emphasis on the physical medium, "the surface appearance." If the *res ipsae* offers a view of the referent through "a transparent window," then *opus ipsum* draws attention to the glass. "Attention is paid to color, shape, texture, arrangement, size, and, at times, material."<sup>364</sup> In its interaction with *res ipsae*, *opus ipsum* can be somewhat jarring. For example:

And the earth churned black behind them, like earth churning  
Solid gold as it was... (18:637-638)

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<sup>362</sup> Becker quotes Andrew Ford who, speaking of Homer, says: "The poetry of the past fulfilled its design as long as audiences forgot the performing poet, and themselves, and everything but the vivid and painless presence of heroic action of old." Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Heffernan, *Museum of Words : The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* p.20.

<sup>364</sup> Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis* p.43.

Here Homer focuses the attention of his audience on the “earth” – and notably not the representation of earth – but then says it “churned...like earth churning.” This latter connection destabilizes the image that had formerly concealed itself. It is redundant to say “earth churns like earth,” for how else could it churn? Thus the mere fact that Homer says it indicates something amiss about this “earth.” This something is explained in the immediate shifting of the audience’s attention to the medium in which the representation is created (“solid gold”). Thus “earth” (the image) is not earth (the referent). This difference is only made “visible” through the interplay of *res ipsae* and *opus ipsum*. *Opus ipsum* renders the viewpoint of the reader highly mobile, shifting as it does from an immersion in the illusion to a vantage point outside of it and back again. The mimetic illusion is placed within a context, not of faithful retelling (“telling it like it is”) but of artificiality; of craftsmanship rather than correspondence. It therefore accomplishes what Becker calls a defamiliarization, which he takes to mean, “that the description is making the representation more representation-y.”<sup>365</sup>

*Opus ipsum* works to defamiliarize and recontextualize *res ipsae*. *Artifex et ars* continues this process. Here, by means of a direct reference to the artist and the process of artistic creation, the audience is further distanced from the illusion. The audience is shown what that illusion is made of, who makes it, and how it is made. It is more and more the case that a solidly established sense of critical distance is established for the audience. From such a distance the audience has the ability to render judgments on the illusion that are not possible from within it. In this third stage of ekphrasis, the natural sign aesthetic is no longer possible as the ontological grounds upon which such an

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid. p.43n78.

aesthetic have been shaken. It is perhaps better to say that in this third level of representation (and even more so in the fourth) the natural sign for the first time appears *as an aesthetic* - rather than *given* - feature of the world.

The fourth level of representation, *animadversor* in Becker's terminology, supplies exactly the kind of judgment that is made possible by *artifex et ars*. Here the interlocutor, the author, exposes himself or herself as yet a further intermediary between the audience and the illusion. This is accomplished through the offering of a reaction to the work described. Returning to the previous example taken from Homer:

And the earth churned black behind them, like earth churning  
Solid gold as it was – that was the wonder of Hephaestus' work.

Homer's awe at "the wonder of Hephaestus' work" is a reaction intended to guide that of his audience. This guidance does not take the commandeering form of an imperative. Nor is it the case that the reaction of the author is the only one permitted to the audience. If it were, the author would be guilty of making yet another "thus it is" claim of exactly the type ekphrasis works to undermine. Rather the author offers a guide to the audience who is then able to make up his or her own mind, and to form his or her own response. The reaction of the author is therefore an invitation for the reader to react. The mimetic illusion makes a double claim: "thus it is" attended by "nothing to be done" (which is voiced in the imperative "do nothing!"). Ekphrasis embraces the power of this representation in its focus on *res ipsae*, yet at the same time undermines it, admonishing the reader to "do something!"

Utilizing these four levels of representation, an ekphrastic tactical approach serves to wedge open an otherwise easily overlooked gap in any claim to certainty.



absolutivity, or unimpeachability. This tactical approach is made possible once one comes to realize, following Nietzsche, that ideologies, institutions, customs and faiths are shaped by human action and are in this manner examples of *poiesis*. These are representations of what is thought to be right, good appropriate, true. They are never themselves *the* right, *the* good, *the* appropriate, *the* true despite any claims that they are - and such claims are both numerous and forceful. Although the interplay of the four levels of representation do open up an opportunity for critical distance, they can also draw the reader further into the illusion. The author offers the reader distance from the object described, but in so doing enhances the reader's trust in the author. It is as if the author, by revealing his or her own distance from the illusion puts his or her own "objectivity" on display. Ironically it is the "subjective" value judgments of the *animadversor* that bring this "objectivity" into relief.

Plato and Baudrillard alike have displayed the power of the mimetic image, "the illusion." To simply disregard this power is a mistake. The ability of ekphrasis to hold the illusion "a bit more lightly and with an acknowledgement of its irony" is of tremendous importance. This ironic stance can stave off what Baudrillard calls "realist abjection," as well as Baudrillard's own "hyperrealist abjection." If this is stated in the terms of the double claim of the shield, the exposure of the "thus it is" as illusory, as ironic, renders the "nothing to be done" that rests upon it equally illusory, equally ironic. If "it" is an illusion, then the categorical dictates of "its" contents ("all is war," "to know the Good is to be good", "all is simulation," etc.) do not carry categorical force. Rather, they carry the unsettled illusion of categorical force. Hence any ethical

imperatives derived from the “thus it is” - specifically the “nothing to be done” and its imperative “do nothing” – are illusions based on illusions.

There is a conscious effort here to avoid the language of “the real.” Such language is highly charged and steeped in a long history of Platonist and Enlightenment thinking which presupposes that to call something illusory is to deny its reality. However, these are not mutually exclusive categories. It may well be that the Athenian embassy to Melos was enthralled by an illusory notion that “the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept,”<sup>366</sup> but this alone does not render their swords less sharp or the fate of the Melians any less bloody or cruel. That the arms of the Athenian soldiers were guided by an illusion does not render the suffering they inflicted any less real. Similarly, the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq may have been an illusion, but that does not make the war or its economic and human costs any less real.

The disruptive, ironic power of ekphrasis renders any appeal to a self-evident reality problematic. Appeals of this sort underpin the “thus it is” of the shield and the “thus it really is” of the mimetic challenge. If mimesis renders the “thus it is” claim the equivalent of “thus it is like,” ekphrasis adds another layer of distance: “thus it is something like it is like.” This double distance does not eradicate the possibility of there being a reality behind the image, but it does remove the possibility of getting beyond the image to find *out once and for all*. The question of the real is suspended, which is to say it is maintained in suspense. This is different from Baudrillard’s

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<sup>366</sup> Thucydides and M.I. Finley, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (London: Penguin Books, 1972) p.402.

position because it is not that the real is no longer a question, or no longer relevant, but rather that the real is maintained as a perpetual question (always still a question). Hence any “thus it is” claim presenting itself as unquestionable is immediately suspect. Any attempt to bear the shield is an open admission that one is dealing in illusion. Ekphrasis marks the shift from “thus it is” to Nietzsche’s “let it be thus!” By rendering the real (the “it is”) a permanent question, ekphrasis also allows for a shift from “there is nothing to be done” to “what is to be done next?”

### **“This is [Something Like] Civilization’s Fight:”**

#### **The Shield of George W. Bush, Revisited**

The present argument opened with a comparison between Homer’s *Iliad* and a speech given by George W. Bush to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001.<sup>367</sup> For the sake of symmetry, an admittedly aesthetic choice, it is to that speech the argument now returns in order to demonstrate the application of ekphrasis as a critical tool. Ekphrasis is most often used to describe the poetic description of a work of art such as a painting or sculpture. In Homer’s description of the shield of Achilles the representational relationships are fairly obvious. The poem offers a representation of the shield, and the shield offers a representation of the world. Nietzsche, in his expansion of what counts as a work of art, opens up the possibility that ekphrasis can be applied in situations that do not at first glance appear to be related to poetry at all. Such is the case with the rhetoric of the Bush Administration in regards to the War on Terror.

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<sup>367</sup> See Appendix A.

Here the relationships are more difficult to discern, if only because doing so is an unfamiliar exercise.

The President's speech, in the guise of a modified State of the Union address, purports to outline the situation facing the American people in the aftermath of the events of September 11. In order to identify the representational relationships within this speech that warrant its treatment as ekphrasis, it helps to place it in context. The speech of September 20, 2001 came at a time of tremendous uncertainty. In the near term, there was still very little public knowledge about who or what was responsible for the events of September 11. Due to this uncertainty there was no clear path of response. A variety of possibilities remained open. Was it a criminal act, best met with a legal response? Was it an attack by another state? Was it a random act of violence? President Bush's speech attempted to answer these questions and to close down all avenues of response but one.<sup>368</sup> The speech therefore offers a depiction of a particular understanding of the world, one that sees the world as being at war.

This particular understanding of the world makes a good deal of sense when it is seen in the context of a longer term uncertainty that had been prevalent since the end of the Cold War. For much of the twentieth century the world had indeed been at war. The end of the Cold War which accompanied the collapse of the great other, the Soviet Union, had left the Western world, led by the United States, in a profound state of uncertainty. Its institutions and ideological orientations had been built on the premise of warding off a dangerous global enemy that was no longer there. Hence this speech

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<sup>368</sup> The attempt is common to instances of the bearing of the shield. It does, however, remain an *attempt*, never quite fully successful once and for all.



aimed, in part, to redraw those lines between us and them, thereby putting the institutional structures of the West back on a more even keel.

In Book 18 of the *Iliad*, there are three distinct levels of reference, as there are in Plato's *Republic*. There is the world, Hephaestus' depiction of the world as it appears on the shield, and Homer's representation of Hephaestus' work. In the speech of September 20, 2001 these levels are also present. There is the world, Bush's understanding of the world, and his depiction of that understanding to his audience. On a surface level, President Bush's speech differs from Homer's account of the shield in that Bush is describing his own creation. He is, in other words both *artifex* and *animadversor*. And yet this difference begins to become less clear when one accepts the reasonably obvious argument that the shield was never a physical object, but a poetic invention of Homer. Homer is thus both *artifex* and *animadversor*. He creates the object and tells his audience how to respond to it. Four years after the speech given by the President, it is difficult to see how Bush's ekphrasis is itself purely notional. Since its initial delivery, more and more evidence has been produced to justify his understanding of the world as one at war. This is to say that his understanding of the world has shaped his actions in the world, which themselves reshape the world. The world becomes more and more the way it is imagined to be. This is the crux of Baudrillard's hyperreality. Where Baudrillard goes wrong is that he sees these representations as perfectible, thus revealing his overconfidence in the persuasive and coercive powers of the state or media, if not an overconfidence in the ontological fathomability of the world. This self-generative effect is particularly clear in the case of the war in Iraq. There is a tendency to naturalize the situation, to make it a mere fact

about which nothing can be done and for which no responsibility can be borne (at the very least not on “our” part).<sup>369</sup>

The mimetic effect of the speech cannot be denied, but this does not mean that it cannot be challenged. An ekphrastic reading of the speech, focusing on the operation of Becker’s four levels of representation will be of assistance in undoing this effect of mimesis concealing itself as mimesis.<sup>370</sup> The reading to follow will show ekphrasis at work within the speech, destabilizing the certainty claimed therein. It will proceed under the precautionary words of Becker who says:

Some passages, phrases, and words can be pushed more than others; some offer more to unfold and consider: hence the commentary will be at times more extensive or repetitive and at others somewhat cursory.<sup>371</sup>

As already mentioned, President Bush presents to his audience the description of a particular worldview. It is not surprising that his speech should open with a guide to what this world looks like. Bush presents a world divided into two camps, and in the opening twenty paragraphs he offers a description of what each camp looks like. After a formal opening, he begins in paragraphs two through eight with an outlining of his main topic of interest, the American people. As might be expected, these paragraphs (one might consider them stanzas) are rife with examples of *opus ipsum*. It is also not unexpected that *res ipsae* should also be apparent here given the intent to “tell it like it

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<sup>369</sup> This is the entire thrust of the bearing of the shield. It is this thrust that ekphrasis as a critical tool is useful in parrying.

<sup>370</sup> Or in Becker’s terms, *opus ipsum* disguising itself as *res ipsae*.

<sup>371</sup> Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis* p.87.

is” – an intent revealed in the identification of the speech as a modified State of the Union address. The fourth paragraph offers a good example of this:

We have seen the state of our Union in the endurance of rescuers, working past exhaustion. We have seen the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers – in English, Hebrew and Arabic. We have seen the decency of a loving and giving people who have made the grief of strangers their own.

The clear references to visual appearance, “we have *seen*” indicate that this passage is an example of *opus ipsum*. Yet although there is a visual component to the actions being described, this is much more a comment on character than appearance. While it is easy to picture the “unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers” Bush does not give detailed descriptions of the size and color of the flags, the shape of the candles, the details of the blood donation facilities, the ornamentation or lack thereof of the houses of worship. These features are irrelevant to the purpose of his depiction, which is to delineate a certain character. Each of these activities are largely symbolic acts indicating a selflessness on the part of the American people, or a recognition of belonging in a community larger than the self.

There is more going on here. The verbs “working,” “unfurling,” “lighting,” “giving,” “saying” set these descriptions in motion. This sense of motion adds a mild element of dramatization, bringing them to life as more than simply appearance. “The endurance of rescuers working past exhaustion” is most clear in this regard. This is to say that the mild dramatization, the setting in motion of the image, is indicative of *res ipsae*. The audience is encouraged to see through the representation and into the world itself.

The remaining two levels of representation, *ars* and *animadversor* are also to be found in this passage. A description of the material out of which “we” are made, *ars*, can be discerned in two places. First, there is a description of the prayers as being “in English, Hebrew and Arabic.” The choice of these languages is notable as each is intended to correspond to one of the major monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. There is no indication that the prayers differ in any way other than the language in which they are spoken. The use of the plural “prayers” is set in a series of iterative actions, “the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood.” These actions are plural by virtue of their repeated performance, and not by a variety in content. He is speaking of a repeated unfurling of the Stars and Stripes, not to the unfurling of a variety of flags. Likewise, the “saying of prayers” designates the repeated saying of what amounts to a single prayer. The material of which the Union is made, the *ars*, is thereby shown to be a monotheistic, yet multilinguistic and multiethnic citizenry. Furthermore, the audience is also told that this Union is composed of “a loving and giving people.” Again, the selflessness of the people is emphasized when it is noted that they “have made the grief of strangers their own.”

There is even a hint of *animadversor* here. It comes in the single word, “decency.” This is a value judgment made by an as yet unidentified narrator. It can be presumed that this narrator is President Bush himself, as is made clear later in the speech. However the repeated use of “we” tends to blur the line between narrator and audience. *Animadversor* in general offers a response to the opus and in doing so, guides the audience towards that same response. Here it remains deliberately unclear as to whose judgment this is, that of the narrator or that of the audience. In remaining



unspecified, the judgment is intended to be that of both. This serves as a means by which the audience comes to trust the narrator, rendering his particular representations more amenable to acceptance as *res ipsae*.

Having established this particular representation of the American Union – “the entire world has seen for itself the state of our Union, and it is strong” – President Bush in paragraph six places it against the backdrop of a larger world.

Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger, and our anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done.

The emphasis on action in these lines is strongly indicative of *res ipsae*, but this is intertwined with *opus ipsum*. Indeed this is the first indication of the scope the opus in its portrayal of a dangerous world within which freedom is under threat. It is through the lens of this *opus ipsum* that the appropriate course of action becomes clear. This course is couched in terms of justice, but at the same time is steeped in the language of war, as seen in the repeated use of the term “enemies.” This is not the justice meted out by the institutions of criminal prosecution, but that of a just war.<sup>372</sup>

The following paragraph again intertwines the different levels of representation. Turning from the people to the leadership, President Bush says, “all of America was touched on the eve of the tragedy to see Republicans and Democrats joined together on

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<sup>372</sup> The question as to whether or not the War on Terror meets the standards of a just war has been a topic of debate. See Neta Crawford, “Just War Theory and the US Counterterror War,” *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 1 (2003), James Turner Johnson, “Jihad and Just War,” *First Things* (2002), Michael Novak, ‘*Asymmetrical Warfare*’ & *Just War : A Moral Obligation* [online journal] (2003 [cited July 6 2005]); available from <http://www.nationalreview.com/novak/novak021003.asp>, *Saddam's Capture May Bring Peace, Doesn't Excuse War, Cardinal Says* (American Catholic.org, 2003 [cited July 6 2005]); available from <http://www.americancatholic.org/News/JustWar/Iraq/>.

the steps of this Capitol, singing ‘God Bless America.’” This line contains within it elements of *animadversor* (“touched”), *opus ipsum* (“Republicans and Democrats joined together”), and *ars* (“singing ‘God Bless America’”). Furthermore, the recollection of this sight as an event indicates the operation of *res ipsae*. Once again, there is a reference to the course of action noted above. The reference to “\$40 billion to rebuild our communities and meet the needs of our military” clearly indicates that this course of action is to be a military response.

The first eight paragraphs focus primarily on one aspect of the *opus*, namely a strong and unified America. In paragraphs nine through twelve this same unity and singularity of purpose (which, for the time being, is underspecified, but military in nature) is expanded outwards. The scope of the *opus ipsum* increases to encompass a global demographic. As above, the references to *opus ipsum* are intertwined with the other levels of representation, particularly *res ipsae*. This broader community is made up of “the sounds of our national anthem,” “prayers of sympathy,” “moments of silence and days of mourning,”<sup>373</sup> and even a shared experience of mortality. Paragraph twelve is quite explicit in its reference to a unity of purpose. Speaking of Great Britain and America, President Bush says, “once again, we are joined together in a great cause.” The temporal qualifier “once again” is a veiled *opus ipsum* as it offers a description that is not exactly visual, but brings forth a powerful mental image nonetheless. The phrase places the relationship in an historical context of prior episodes of “joining together.” This series of joinings includes the three defining conflicts of the twentieth century:

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<sup>373</sup> These descriptions of the global America tell the audience both what it looks like (*opus ipsum*) and the materials of which it is put together (*ars*).

World War One, World War Two, and the Cold War. This reference is implicit here, but made explicit later in the speech. Each of these conflicts was understood as total and as having the highest stakes. Furthermore, each of these conflicts resulted in a victory for the partnership. That the two are “once again joined in a great cause” thus implies the presence of yet another epochal conflict with a global reach and the highest of stakes, and that this conflict will ultimately be won. As above, this implication is rendered explicit later in the speech. Although the word has not yet been mentioned, it is clear that the world being crafted in Bush’s speech is to be a world at war.

It comes as no surprise that the very next paragraph opens with the statement “On September the 11<sup>th</sup>, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country.” This paragraph marks a transition in the references to the *opus ipsum*. Where the preceding statements placed an emphasis on a description of “our side,” or what has been called the “city at peace,” the subsequent references are focused on “their side,” or the “city at war.” This “other” face of the *opus* is marked by overt aggression. The key descriptors in this transitional paragraph are “war,” which is mentioned four times in near succession, “casualties,” and “attack,” mentioned twice in succession. This is the stage upon which the “loving and giving,” “free” people of the global America appear. Their counterparts are then detailed at some length. Just as President Bush has shown what “our” side looks like (*opus ipsum*), what it is made of (*ars*), and how “we” should respond to it (*animadversor*), so too does he speak of “their” side. It is not unexpected that the depictions he offers are inversions of what has come before.

Americans are asking: Who attacked our country? The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist

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organizations known as al Qaeda. They are the same murderers indicted for bombing American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, and responsible for the bombing of the USS Cole.

As may be expected, *opus ipsum* figures prominently in this passage. It is most notable in the depiction of al Qaeda as “loosely affiliated” where “we are joined together” with a “unity of purpose.” In many ways this leaves al Qaeda in a hazy, borderline space somewhere between a solid identity (such as “we” have) and a non-identity. There are subtle, tacit indications of *ars* here when one considers that the strength of the global America resides in its “joining together” and in its unity. By comparison, al Qaeda, which is presented as ambivalent in regards to its status as an organization or multiple organizations, cannot possibly be made of the same stuff. Its lack of unity in this regard implies an inherent weakness. As may also be expected, *res ipsae* on the level of naming (“al Qaeda”) and interpreting (“murderers” and “terrorists”) is evident in these same lines. It is obvious that the interpretations are also intertwined with *animadversor*, as these terms are far from complimentary, nor are they intended to be received as complimentary.

Keeping with the theme of describing “them,” paragraph fourteen provides an example of *opus ipsum* that operates through an analogy:

Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world –and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere.

This analogy creates a vivid image of brutality in the minds of the audience. It also plays off of the language used so far in the speech that has been notably ambivalent between the statuses of the events as either acts of war or criminal acts. This ambivalence has been noted in the use of the term “justice” and can also be seen in



Bush's repeated use of "murderers" and "indictment," even after he has declared the events to be acts of war. In his analogy he makes an attempt to bridge this uneasy gap. It may well be that a law enforcement based approach is warranted and appropriate when dealing with the Mafia, whose main concern is with money – which is well within the parameters of the state apparatus. The remaking of the world however is not subject to state regulation in the same way currency is. The implication is that an appropriate response to this threat must move beyond the constraints of a given legal code or judicial system. In short, it must take the form of any other mortal conflict between incompatible systems, namely, war.<sup>374</sup>

To say that war is the only acceptable response is still a powerful and controversial claim at the time the speech is given. As if to ease its acceptance, its declaration is couched in language that is rife with examples *animadversor*. The beliefs of the terrorists are described as "a *fringe* form of Islamic *extremism*" and "a *fringe* movement that *perverts* the peaceful teachings of Islam." It is clear that this description is intended to guide the audience's reception of the statements. It is a particularly forceful guide, especially in the first description, which renders "their" position extreme, even among extremisms. Not only is it "extremism," but also it is a "fringe form" of it. It is an extremism even most extremists would reject. Set against what the audience has already been told about "us" the marginalization of "them" is highlighted.

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<sup>374</sup> There remains the difficulty that war generally defines a particular relationship between states, and al Qaeda is clearly not a state. This is quite entirely glossed over in the President's speech, in part by his deployment of the Pearl Harbour analogy. The focus on the state (and hence the central position occupied by its institutional structures) is thrust to the fore in the naming of the "Axis of Evil" (Iran, Iraq, and North Korea; all states in the traditional sense).

Paragraphs fourteen through twenty are notable in that President Bush's discussion of the world the terrorists wish to construct is an ekphrasis within an ekphrasis. President Bush, in the role of bard, offers a verbal representation of a non-verbal representation of the world. The referential relationships in this sub-ekphrasis are between the world, al Qaeda's representation of the world (Afghanistan under Taliban rule), and Bush's commentary on that representation. Bush deliberately downplays *res ipsae* here, except in the most pejorative terms ("Afghanistan's people have been brutalized"), in order to more starkly reveal this representation as distinct from the world it purports to represent. Each of the four levels of representation inherent in ekphrasis is to be found in these paragraphs. There is direct reference to *opus ipsum* ("in Afghanistan we see al Qaeda's vision for the world"), *artifex* ("Osama bin Laden"), *ars* ("women are not allowed to attend school...Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate"), and of course *animadversor*. *Animadversor* is perhaps the most pronounced here as it provides distance from the representation, breaking its mimetic power. Recall that in Homer's account of the shield of Achilles, *animadversor* is often seen in the poet's praise of the beauty and wondrousness of Hephaestus's work. Here it is seen in the "condemnation" of the work of al Qaeda and its allies. Thus Bush speaks of the "brutalization" and "repression" of the Afghan people, the "evil" plotted by the terrorists, and their "murderous" nature.

One other function of the blatant ekphrasis of these passages is that it serves to increase the audience's trust in the narrator. Bush places the "remaking of the world" firmly on "their" agenda, thereby obscuring its presence on his agenda as well. The sub-ekphrasis works both to expose "their" representation of the world as a distortion,

and to conceal the status of Bush's own representation as a representation. One ekphrasis works to conceal the presence of another. Evidence for this is to be found in the re-emphasis on *res ipsae* in the next three paragraphs. In the first twenty paragraphs, two opposing aspects of the overall picture have been introduced. At this point the audience has an idea of what "we" look like, what "they" look like, and what the situation as a whole looks like.<sup>375</sup> The next phase of the greater ekphrasis sets these representations in motion. Gone are the depictions of a distorted worldview. Instead there is a departure from this worldview, back into "the real world" in which

America makes the following demands on the Taliban: Deliver to the United States authorities all the leaders of al Qaeda who hide in your land. (Applause.) Release all foreign nationals, including American citizens, you have unjustly imprisoned. Protect foreign journalists, diplomats, and aid workers in your country. Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, and hand over every terrorist, and every person in their support structure, to appropriate authorities. (Applause.) Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps, so we can make sure they are no longer operating.

These demands are not open to negotiation or discussion. (Applause.) The Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate.

The language here is immediate, dramatic, and consequential. Here in its most obvious form, is the "thus it is" and "nothing (else) to be done about it" that characterises the bearing of the shield. As an example of *res ipsae* it is as though this passage is a retort to al Qaeda's vision of the world from the unmediated perspective of the world itself. It renders the problems of waging a war on a non-state (al Qaeda) moot by effacing the distinction between it and its state sponsor, Afghanistan. It does not treat war as one

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<sup>375</sup> A visual metaphor is used here, although the important features of their respective "appearances" have much more to do with their respective characters.

possibility among many, but speaks as if it were always already there. Rather, given the impossibly broad scope of the demands, the passage also ensures that the *opus* Bush seeks to create, a global America unified within the context of world at war, is all but guaranteed.

Later in the speech it will become even clearer that not only is the war here now, it has been and will be here *on an existential level*. This begins with Bush's pronouncement that:

Our war on terror begins withal Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.

Note that the war in question has shifted to become "our war." *Res ipsae* seems to hold sway here, but it can be seen as *opus ipsum* when one recalls the context within which the speech was given. A mere nine days after the events of September 11 it was far from a given that this was an act of war rather than a heinous criminal act, as other instances of terrorism had been treated to that point.<sup>376</sup> The same can be said of Bush's comment "Americans are asking, why do they hate us?" This is presented as *res ipsae*, but is revealed as *opus ipsum* when it is recalled that at that time, many Americans had no inclination of who "they" were.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> The foremost example is the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, although one might also make reference to the 1982 bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon, or the blowing up of a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland. In each of these cases the response was to launch a criminal investigation rather than a war.

<sup>377</sup> Based on personal and anecdotal observations made at the time, this was not a question on the minds of many people at all. More common were the questions "What is happening? How could this happen? How many were killed? How can I / we help those in need?"



Indeed this question seems somewhat incongruous as *res ipsae* when only a few paragraphs before these same Americans are depicted as asking, “who attacked our country?” More attention is required here to resolve this incongruity. There is a presumption in Bush’s question that its temporal horizon extends back to September 11. The President indicates that this question is something he found “out there” in the world since the attacks. In this guise it does act as an example of *res ipsae*. However, as indicated, this would be a rather odd question to ask if there was no known “they.” It is a question suitably asked once “they” are identified, and given that this identification was made publicly only minutes earlier, the temporal horizon of the question must be seriously foreshortened. The President establishes the outline of a framework within which hatred plays a large role. For those who have accepted Bush’s framework and its implications *as they have been presented in the speech so far* the question is a legitimate one, and an accurate description of their state of mind. In other words, the temporal horizon of the question extends back only a few paragraphs, and not to September 11.

This foreshortened horizon in turn reveals an interesting feature of the term “Americans.” If it is the case that Americans – and the language used to this point in the speech makes it clear that the President is speaking of *all* Americans - are asking this question, then it can be implied that to not ask the question is to be un-American. As it is the case that the only people asking this question are those in agreement with President Bush’s representation of the situation, then to disagree with the President is also to be un-American. This is a theme that will come up over and over again, and in

not nearly so subtle a form, not just in this speech, but also in much of the rhetoric coming from the Bush Administration.

A fleshing out of the *opus ipsum* as to what “they” are like and what “they” want follows the President’s question. Paragraph twenty-eight is notable for its particularly powerful imagery.

We are not deceived by their pretences to piety. We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the twentieth century. By sacrificing human lives to serve their radical visions -by abandoning every value except the will to power – the follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends: in history’s unmarked grave of discarded lies.

The opening sentence and the allusion to “the will to power” offer enticing clues as to how this speech is to be understood. Any reference to “the will to power” unavoidably raises the specter of Nietzsche.<sup>378</sup> It has already been shown that Nietzsche is a proponent of becoming over Being, and it is through Nietzsche’s work that it is possible to understand all of life as poiesis. It is through Nietzsche that it becomes possible to treat the speech in question as an ekphrasis, thereby diminishing the power of its dual claim of “thus it is” and “nothing (else) to be done.” The President’s claims are vulnerable to such a reading, and it is no surprise that he dismisses the possibility of such a reading as one of history’s “discarded lies.” At the same time to be “not deceived by their pretences to piety” is to bring to mind Socrates as Plato presents him in the *Euthyphro*.<sup>379</sup> The earlier chapters of this argument presented an antagonism between

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<sup>378</sup> President Bush employs the phrase “will to power” as a reference to Naziism, (as he makes immediately clear), an ideology that is known for its blatant (mis)appropriation of Nietzsche’s thought.

<sup>379</sup> Plato, “Euthyphro.”

Plato on the one hand and Nietzsche on the other. Plato's position was presented as one in which a "thus it is" claim could be made more or less unproblematically. Given that it is just such a claim that Bush hopes to make, it is expected that he would place himself on this side of the debate. Furthermore, Bush clandestinely places his audience in the same camp when he insists that "we are not deceived." This passage testifies not only to the drawing of a battle line in the "war on terror," but also one in what has since come to be known as "the culture wars."

These lines are also notable in that they mark a return to the theme of a "great cause," making explicit that which was previously implied. In paragraph twelve, Bush mentions Great Britain and America "once again...joined together in a great cause." In paragraph twenty-eight he explicates the circumstances of the prior occasions of "joining together." Bush's mention of "fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism" calls to mind the open combat of World War Two and the proxy battles of the Cold War. Each of these "murderous ideologies" was met with an armed response, and each was thereby defeated. Each conflict resulted in a victory for "our" side and this is not an insinuation that is meant to go unnoticed. For "we" just like "they" will "follow that path all the way, to where it ends." For them, the results are explicitly stated. For us, certain victory remains implicit, at least for the time being.

Paragraphs twenty to thirty one effect a transition from *opus ipsum* to *res ipsae*, even though the other elements of ekphrasis are present. This transition is completed at the end of paragraph thirty-one when President Bush states:

Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbour or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.

This statement definitively establishes the war not as one option among many, or as simply between America and Afghanistan, but as tangible, global, and necessary. There is no neutral ground in this war, even for God, as will be made explicit at the end of the speech. The ethos corresponding to Bush's "thus it is" takes form, appropriately enough, as a paraphrase of the words of Jesus Christ, "you are with us or, you are with the terrorists."<sup>380</sup> This paraphrase puts Bush in the role of Christ. He effectively claims for himself a divine authority on the matter. As is the case with the shield of Achilles, to resist is to defy God. However, George W. Bush is not God, however much he might wish to claim that title, and this statement therefore speaks of the hubris often associated with the bearing of the shield.

Although this is a rather striking example of hubris, its impact is lessened by the early paragraphs in the speech. President Bush has eased his audience into his own worldview, and worked to gain the trust of his audience. This is evident in his use of a sub-ekphrasis, discussed above, and in his intertwining of *opus ipsum* and *res ipsae*. It is a testimony to the power of his poetry that he can blur the line between image and referent so effectively. In setting forth his opus as referent, Bush has narrowed the options of appropriate response to the challenge of September 11. Indeed, he has narrowed them to a single binary choice. He has blocked other avenues through which this choice appears arbitrary, and thus he has lessened the impact of his hubris upon the sensibilities of his audience. Imagine, for a moment, if he had opened his speech with this stark and theologically burdened statement. It is likely that any persuasive power

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<sup>380</sup> See Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23 both of which read "He that is not with me is against me."



of the speech would have been greatly reduced. It would have been reduced to an extended example of “preaching to the converted.” But instead he buries the comment well into his depiction of the world, after he has already brought his audience along with him.

Confident in the mimetic power of what he has presented, President Bush is free to specify more clearly the creator of this artifice. It is at this point that the role of *artifex* becomes more prominent. The audience has seen what is being made, and of what it is made – each intended to be understood as what *is*. Now they can see *by whom* it is made. In paragraphs thirty-two through forty-six, examples of self-referentiality become apparent. More than anywhere else in the speech, President Bush speaks of himself in the first person. He speaks of himself as the one who “create[s]” new governmental structures (“the Office of Homeland Security”), “announce[s]” the people who will run them, “call[s] the Armed Forces to alert,” and answers the question “what is expected of us [Americans]?” Having presented his work, he wishes to take credit for it. However, lest his emphasis on his own authority in regards to this opus result in a reduction of its mimetic effect, he returns to the use of the plural “we.” The fluctuation between “I” and “we” serves to render a firm distinction between the two terms difficult. This in turn serves to distribute responsibility for the situation “on the ground” more broadly. Hence, although he has identified himself as *the* instrumental

actor in the creation of the war,<sup>381</sup> this is not George W. Bush's fight, but America's fight.

This is not, however, just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.

By setting the conflict in these terms, he renders it existential, beyond the capacity of any one individual to create. Thus he claims his creation, and denies it so that it might prove more effective.<sup>382</sup> He claims a monopoly on the meaning of the events, and bolsters his position by rendering that meaning unchallengeable. An earlier example of this strategy has already been discussed. Here the implications of resistance are more clearly spelled out. It has already been made explicit that one must agree with President Bush's assessment and proscriptions or be a terrorist. Here, to suggest even an alternative to fighting is to be outside of civilization, to be a non-believer in "progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom." By these terms, one cannot possibly speak out against war – or any other policies of the Bush Administration for that matter – in the name of any of these ideals.

The value laden terminology within which the war is couched is a tip off to the presence of *animadversor*. Indeed the remaining paragraphs of the speech are particularly strong in it, although its presence pervades almost the entire speech. Of the four levels of representation within ekphrasis, *animadversor* is the most self-referential,

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<sup>381</sup> This is to say that he has identified himself as *artifex* in the creation of a world in which war is both inevitable and necessary. This is his opus, though it is not the only possible one that could have been made.

<sup>382</sup> This is a profoundly Odyssean moment in the speech.

and therefore the most useful in achieving critical distance from the image presented. It allows the attentive reader to see the mimetic images of the *opus ipsum* as images, distinct from that which they purport to represent. At the same time it can lead the audience closer to the referent.<sup>383</sup> In this later capacity, it is a guide to audience response and, conveniently, in the transcript of the President's speech there are notations of audience response in the form of applause. The notation "(Applause)" appears a total of thirty times over the course of the speech, and all but four are preceded by clear examples of *animadversor*. One of these four comes at the conclusion of the speech and may be treated as conventional. This is to say that the notation of applause at the conclusion of any speech need not be taken as acceptance of or agreement with anything said in the speech, but is rather related to the platitudes of recognizing its coming to an end. The other three come after decisive statements of intent: "These demands are not open to negotiation or discussion," "it [the war] will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated," and "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

The last of these quotes is the easiest to deal with, and is therefore a good starting point for a closer examination. *Animadversor* is expressed as value judgments of the *opus* by a narrator. These value judgments are intended to guide the response of the audience. Although no such judgments are present in the quote, it is still a clear guide to audience response. It is obvious that there is a right way and a wrong way to respond to this binary choice. This therefore qualifies as an example of *animadversor*,

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<sup>383</sup> Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis* p.153. It is most appropriate to say that *animadversor* does both simultaneously, celebrating in itself the destabilising effects of ekphrasis as a whole.

even if the audience is brought closer to the referent (a world where “freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war”) rather than being offered distance from it. Along the same lines, it is also apparent that the first of the quotes above is a guide to audience response. The audience in this case is being told that “negotiation or discussion” is not an appropriate or acceptable course of action. The applause noted in both of these cases indicates an acceptance on the part of President Bush’s immediate audience – the members of the House and Senate – of the response parameters as they have been set in the speech. It is, for all intents and purposes, an acceptance of the power of the mimetic effect of his words. It is an acknowledgement of pride in the fact that “we” are doing the right thing. At the same time, the notation of applause within the transcript of the speech is itself a value judgment of the contents of the speech.<sup>384</sup> Each notation is therefore a second order *animadversor*, intended to guide the response of a broader audience than those sitting in the room while the speech is given.

With this in mind, the remaining quote also falls under the category of *animadversor*. The applause noted after the declaration that “it [the war] will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated” indicates to the reader that this is a worthy project, and that this opus is (quite literally) a laudable one. As with the other two quotes, the audience is directed towards the referent (*res ipsae*) and any mediating distance from it is occluded. The *opus ipsum* is represented as *res ipsae* (the mimetic effect) and at the same time it is as if the applause is saying “what a magnificent creation!” There is a simultaneous collapse and

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<sup>384</sup> The one possible exception at the conclusion of the speech having already been noted.



expansion (implosion and explosion) of critical distance. The destabilizing effect of *animadversor* in this instance, and in ekphrasis as a whole, sets the entire image of a fixed world (“thus it is”) in motion.

By exposing the “thus it is” claim as a representation of a representation, ekphrasis as a critical tool opens the possibility for things to be otherwise. President Bush’s worldview as presented in the September 20 speech does not offer unfettered access to the world as it is, but is rather a particular telling of a particular telling (in this case, a Neoconservative ideological understanding of the world). Like the childhood “telephone game” the possibility – even the likelihood – that each subsequent telling will leave something out, or add something in, or alter things entirely remains irreducible. Thus any ethical imperative based on the “thus it is” is equally open to challenge. The “nothing else to be done” and its imperative “do nothing else!” thus becomes the question “what else is to be done?”<sup>385</sup> Ekphrasis does not in itself offer specific policy suggestions, but it does set limits on what such suggestions might look like. Whatever course of action is to be taken, ekphrasis as a critical tool reminds us that it cannot be backed with the force of absolute, unimpeachable certainty or by an *unqualified must*.

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<sup>385</sup> Or the imperative “Do something else!”

## **APPENDIX A:**

### **PRESIDENT BUSH'S ADDRESS TO A JOINT SESSION OF CONGRESS**

United States Capitol  
Washington, D.C.  
September 20, 2001  
9:00 P.M. EDT

[1] THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro Tempore, members of Congress, and fellow Americans:

[2] In the normal course of events, Presidents come to this chamber to report on the state of the Union. Tonight, no such report is needed. It has already been delivered by the American people.

[3] We have seen it in the courage of passengers, who rushed terrorists to save others on the ground -- passengers like an exceptional man named Todd Beamer. And would you please help me to welcome his wife, Lisa Beamer, here tonight. (Applause.)

[4] We have seen the state of our Union in the endurance of rescuers, working past exhaustion. We have seen the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers -- in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. We have seen the decency of a loving and giving people who have made the grief of strangers their own.

[5] My fellow citizens, for the last nine days, the entire world has seen for itself the state of our Union -- and it is strong. (Applause.)

[6] Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done. (Applause.)

[7] I thank the Congress for its leadership at such an important time. All of America was touched on the evening of the tragedy to see Republicans and Democrats joined together on the steps of this Capitol, singing "God Bless America." And you did more than sing; you acted, by delivering \$40 billion to rebuild our communities and meet the needs of our military.

[8] Speaker Hastert, Minority Leader Gephardt, Majority Leader Daschle and Senator Lott, I thank you for your friendship, for your leadership and for your service to our country. (Applause.)

[9] And on behalf of the American people, I thank the world for its outpouring of support. America will never forget the sounds of our National Anthem playing at Buckingham Palace, on the streets of Paris, and at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate.

[10] We will not forget South Korean children gathering to pray outside our embassy in Seoul, or the prayers of sympathy offered at a mosque in Cairo. We will not forget moments of silence and days of mourning in Australia and Africa and Latin America.

[11] Nor will we forget the citizens of 80 other nations who died with our own: dozens of Pakistanis; more than 130 Israelis; more than 250 citizens of India; men and women from El Salvador, Iran, Mexico and Japan; and hundreds of British citizens. America has no truer friend than Great Britain. (Applause.) Once again, we are joined together in a great cause -- so honored the British Prime Minister has crossed an ocean to show his unity of purpose with America. Thank you for coming, friend. (Applause.)

[12] On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars -- but for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. Americans have known the casualties of war -- but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning. Americans have known surprise attacks -- but never before on thousands of civilians. All of this was brought upon us in a single day -- and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack.

[13] Americans have many questions tonight. Americans are asking: Who attacked our country? The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al Qaeda. They are the same murderers indicted for bombing American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, and responsible for bombing the USS Cole.

[14] Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world -- and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere.

[15] The terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics -- a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam. The terrorists' directive



commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans, and make no distinction among military and civilians, including women and children.

[16] This group and its leader -- a person named Osama bin Laden -- are linked to many other organizations in different countries, including the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. There are thousands of these terrorists in more than 60 countries. They are recruited from their own nations and neighborhoods and brought to camps in places like Afghanistan, where they are trained in the tactics of terror. They are sent back to their homes or sent to hide in countries around the world to plot evil and destruction.

[17] The leadership of al Qaeda has great influence in Afghanistan and supports the Taliban regime in controlling most of that country. In Afghanistan, we see al Qaeda's vision for the world.

[18] Afghanistan's people have been brutalized -- many are starving and many have fled. Women are not allowed to attend school. You can be jailed for owning a television. Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate. A man can be jailed in Afghanistan if his beard is not long enough.

[19] The United States respects the people of Afghanistan -- after all, we are currently its largest source of humanitarian aid -- but we condemn the Taliban regime. (Applause.) It is not only repressing its own people, it is threatening people everywhere by sponsoring and sheltering and supplying terrorists. By aiding and abetting murder, the Taliban regime is committing murder.

[20] And tonight, the United States of America makes the following demands on the Taliban: Deliver to United States authorities all the leaders of al Qaeda who hide in your land. (Applause.) Release all foreign nationals, including American citizens, you have unjustly imprisoned. Protect foreign journalists, diplomats and aid workers in your country. Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, and hand over every terrorist, and every person in their support structure, to appropriate authorities. (Applause.) Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps, so we can make sure they are no longer operating.

[21] These demands are not open to negotiation or discussion. (Applause.) The Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate.

[22] I also want to speak tonight directly to Muslims throughout the world. We respect your faith. It's practiced freely by many millions of Americans, and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good



and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah. (Applause.) The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them. (Applause.)

[23] Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated. (Applause.)

[24] Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber -- a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms -- our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.

[25] They want to overthrow existing governments in many Muslim countries, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. They want to drive Israel out of the Middle East. They want to drive Christians and Jews out of vast regions of Asia and Africa.

[26] These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life. With every atrocity, they hope that America grows fearful, retreating from the world and forsaking our friends. They stand against us, because we stand in their way.

[27] We are not deceived by their pretenses to piety. We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions -- by abandoning every value except the will to power -- they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends: in history's unmarked grave of discarded lies. (Applause.)

[28] Americans are asking: How will we fight and win this war? We will direct every resource at our command -- every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network.

[29] This war will not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago, with a decisive liberation of territory and a swift conclusion. It will not look like the air war above Kosovo two years ago, where no ground troops were used and not a single American was lost in combat.

[30] Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success. We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. (Applause.) From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.

[31] Our nation has been put on notice: We are not immune from attack. We will take defensive measures against terrorism to protect Americans. Today, dozens of federal departments and agencies, as well as state and local governments, have responsibilities affecting homeland security. These efforts must be coordinated at the highest level. So tonight I announce the creation of a Cabinet-level position reporting directly to me -- the Office of Homeland Security.

[32] And tonight I also announce a distinguished American to lead this effort, to strengthen American security: a military veteran, an effective governor, a true patriot, a trusted friend -- Pennsylvania's Tom Ridge. (Applause.) He will lead, oversee and coordinate a comprehensive national strategy to safeguard our country against terrorism, and respond to any attacks that may come.

[33] These measures are essential. But the only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows. (Applause.)

[34] Many will be involved in this effort, from FBI agents to intelligence operatives to the reservists we have called to active duty. All deserve our thanks, and all have our prayers. And tonight, a few miles from the damaged Pentagon, I have a message for our military: Be ready. I've called the Armed Forces to alert, and there is a reason. The hour is coming when America will act, and you will make us proud. (Applause.)

[35] This is not, however, just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.

[36] We ask every nation to join us. We will ask, and we will need, the help of police forces, intelligence services, and banking systems around the world. The United States is grateful that many nations and many international organizations

have already responded -- with sympathy and with support. Nations from Latin America, to Asia, to Africa, to Europe, to the Islamic world. Perhaps the NATO Charter reflects best the attitude of the world: An attack on one is an attack on all.

[37] The civilized world is rallying to America's side. They understand that if this terror goes unpunished, their own cities, their own citizens may be next. Terror, unanswered, can not only bring down buildings, it can threaten the stability of legitimate governments. And you know what -- we're not going to allow it. (Applause.)

[38] Americans are asking: What is expected of us? I ask you to live your lives, and hug your children. I know many citizens have fears tonight, and I ask you to be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat.

[39] I ask you to uphold the values of America, and remember why so many have come here. We are in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them. No one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith. (Applause.)

[40] I ask you to continue to support the victims of this tragedy with your contributions. Those who want to give can go to a central source of information, [libertyunites.org](http://libertyunites.org), to find the names of groups providing direct help in New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

[41] The thousands of FBI agents who are now at work in this investigation may need your cooperation, and I ask you to give it.

[42] I ask for your patience, with the delays and inconveniences that may accompany tighter security; and for your patience in what will be a long struggle.

[43] I ask your continued participation and confidence in the American economy. Terrorists attacked a symbol of American prosperity. They did not touch its source. America is successful because of the hard work, and creativity, and enterprise of our people. These were the true strengths of our economy before September 11th, and they are our strengths today. (Applause.)

[44] And, finally, please continue praying for the victims of terror and their families, for those in uniform, and for our great country. Prayer has comforted us in sorrow, and will help strengthen us for the journey ahead.

[45] Tonight I thank my fellow Americans for what you have already done and for what you will do. And ladies and gentlemen of the Congress, I thank you,



their representatives, for what you have already done and for what we will do together.

[46] Tonight, we face new and sudden national challenges. We will come together to improve air safety, to dramatically expand the number of air marshals on domestic flights, and take new measures to prevent hijacking. We will come together to promote stability and keep our airlines flying, with direct assistance during this emergency. (Applause.)

[47] We will come together to give law enforcement the additional tools it needs to track down terror here at home. (Applause.) We will come together to strengthen our intelligence capabilities to know the plans of terrorists before they act, and find them before they strike. (Applause.)

[48] We will come together to take active steps that strengthen America's economy, and put our people back to work.

[49] Tonight we welcome two leaders who embody the extraordinary spirit of all New Yorkers: Governor George Pataki, and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. (Applause.) As a symbol of America's resolve, my administration will work with Congress, and these two leaders, to show the world that we will rebuild New York City. (Applause.)

[50] After all that has just passed -- all the lives taken, and all the possibilities and hopes that died with them -- it is natural to wonder if America's future is one of fear. Some speak of an age of terror. I know there are struggles ahead, and dangers to face. But this country will define our times, not be defined by them. As long as the United States of America is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror; this will be an age of liberty, here and across the world. (Applause.)

[51] Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom -- the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time -- now depends on us. Our nation -- this generation -- will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail. (Applause.)

[52] It is my hope that in the months and years ahead, life will return almost to normal. We'll go back to our lives and routines, and that is good. Even grief recedes with time and grace. But our resolve must not pass. Each of us will remember what happened that day, and to whom it happened. We'll remember



the moment the news came -- where we were and what we were doing. Some will remember an image of a fire, or a story of rescue. Some will carry memories of a face and a voice gone forever.

[53] And I will carry this: It is the police shield of a man named George Howard, who died at the World Trade Center trying to save others. It was given to me by his mom, Arlene, as a proud memorial to her son. This is my reminder of lives that ended, and a task that does not end. (Applause.)

[54] I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people.

[55] The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them. (Applause.)

[56] Fellow citizens, we'll meet violence with patient justice -- assured of the rightness of our cause, and confident of the victories to come. In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom, and may He watch over the United States of America.

[57] Thank you. (Applause.)

END            9:41 P.M. EDT

## APPENDIX B:

### THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES

Quoted from

And first Haephestus makes a great and massive shield,  
Blazoning well-wrought emblems all across its surface,  
Raising a rim around it , glittering, triple-ply 560  
With a silver shield-strap run from edge to edge  
And five layers of metal to build the shield itself.  
And across its vast expanse with all his craft and cunning  
The god creates a world of gorgeous immortal work.

There he made the earth and there the sky and the sea  
And the inexhaustible blazing sun and the moon rounding full  
And there the constellations, all that crown the heavens,  
And the Pleiades and the Hyades, Orion in all his power too  
And the Great Bear that mankind also calls the Wagon:  
She wheels on her axis always fixed, atching the Hunter, 570  
And she alone is denied a plunge in the Ocean's baths.

And he forged on the shield two noble cities filled  
with mortal men. With weddings and wedding feasts in one  
and under glowing torches they brought for the the brides  
from the women's chambers, marching through the streets  
while choir on choir the wedding song rose high  
and the young men came dancing, whirling around in rings  
and among them flutes and harps kept up their stirring call –  
women rushed to the doors and each stood moved with wonder.  
And the people massed, streaming into the marketplace 580  
Where a quarrel had broken out and two men struggled  
Over the blood-price for an kinsman just murdered.  
One declaimed in public, vowing payment in full –  
The other spurned him, he would not take a thing –  
So both men pressed for a judge to cut the knot.  
The crowd cheered on both, they took both sides,  
But heralds held them back as the city elders sat  
On polished stone benches, forming the sacred circle,  
grasping in hand the staffs of clear-voiced heralds,  
and each leapt to his feet to plead the case in turn. 590  
Two bars of solid gold shone on the ground before them,  
A prize for the judge who'd speak the straightest verdict.

But circling the other city camped a divided army  
Gleaming in battle-gear, and two plans split their ranks:

To plunder the city or share the riches with its people,  
 Hoards the handsome citadel stored within its depths.  
 But the people were not surrendering, not at all.  
 They armed for a raid, hoping to break the siege –  
 Loving wives and innocent children standing guard  
 On the ramparts, flanked by elders bent with age 600  
 As men marched out to war. Ares and Pallas led them,  
 Both burnished gold, gold the attire they donned, and great,  
 Magnificent in their armour – gods for all the world,  
 Looming up in their brilliance, towering over troops.  
 And once they reached the perfect spot for attack,  
 A watering place where all the herds collected,  
 There they crouched, wrapped in glowing bronze.  
 Detached from the ranks, two scouts took up their posts,  
 The eyes of the army waiting to spot a convoy,  
 The enemy's flocks and crook-horned cattle coming... 610  
 Come they did, quickly, two shepherds behind them.  
 Playing their hearts out on their pipes – treachery  
 Never crossed their minds. But the soldiers saw them,  
 Rushed them, cut off at a stroke the herds of oxen  
 And sleek sheep-flocks glistening silver-gray  
 And killed the herdsmen too. Now the besiegers,  
 Soon as they heard the uproar burst from the cattle  
 As they debated, huddled in council, mounted at once  
 Behind their racing teams, rode hard to the rescue,  
 Arrived at once, and lining up for assault 620  
 Both armies battled it out along the river banks –  
 They raked each other with hurtling bronze-tipped spears.  
 And Strife and Havoc plunged in the fight, and violent Death –  
 Now seizing a man alive with fresh wounds, now one unhurt,  
 Now hauling a dead man through the slaughter by the heels,  
 The cloak on her back stained red with human blood.  
 So they clashed and fought like living, breathing men  
 Grappling each other's corpses, dragging off the dead.

And he forged a fallow field, broad rich plowland  
 Tilled for the third time, and across it crews of ploughmen 630  
 Wheeled their teams, driving them up and back and soon  
 As they'd reach the end-strip, moving into the turn,  
 A man would run up quickly  
 And hand them a cup of honeyed, mellow wine  
 As the crews would turn back down along the furrows,  
 Pressing again to reach the end of the deep fallow field  
 And the earth churned black behind them, like earth churning,  
 Solid gold as it was – that was the wonder of Hephaestus' work.

And he forged a king's estate where harvesters laboured,  
Reaping the ripe grain, swinging their whetted scythes. 640  
Some stalks fell in line with the reapers, row on row,  
And others the sheaf-binders girded round with ropes,  
Three binders standing over the sheaves, behind them  
Boys gathering up the cut swaths, filling heir arms,  
Supplying grain to the binders, endless bundles.  
And there in the midst the king,  
Scepter in hand at the head of the reaping-rows,  
Stood tall in silence, rejoicing in his heart.  
And off to the side, beneath a spreading oak,  
The heralds were setting out the harvest feast, 650  
They were dressing a great ox they had slaughtered,  
While attendant women poured out barley, generous,  
Glistening handfuls strewn for the reapers' midday meal.

And he forged a thriving vineyard loaded with clusters,  
Bunches of lustrous grapes in gold, ripening deep purple  
And climbing vines shot up on silver vine-poles.  
And round it he cut a ditch in dark blue enamel  
And round the ditch he staked a fence in tin.  
And one lone footpath led toward the vineyard  
And down it the pickers ran 660  
Whenever they went to strip the grapes at vintage –  
Girls and boys, their hearts leaping in innocence,  
Bearing away the sweet ripe fruit in wicker baskets.  
And there among them a young boy plucked his lyre,  
So clecar it could break the heart with longing,  
And what he sang was a dirge for the dying year,  
Lovely...his fine voice rising anfd falling low  
As therest followed, all together, frisking, singing,  
Shouting, their dancing footsteps beating out the time.

And he forged on the shield a herd of longhorn cattle, 670  
Working the bulls in baten gold and tin, lowing loud  
And rumbling out of the farmyard dung to pasture  
Along a rippling stream, along the swaying reeds.  
And the golden drovers kept the herd in line,  
Four in all, with nine dogs at their heels,  
Their paws flickering quickly – a savage roar! –  
A crashing attack – and a pair of rampaging lions  
Had seized a bull from the cattle's front ranks –  
He bellowed out as they dragged him off in agony.  
Packs of dogs and the young herdsmen rushed to help 680  
But the lions ripping open the hide of the huge bull  
Were gulping down the guts and the black pooling blood



While the herdsmen yelled the fast pack on – no use.  
The hounds shrank from sinking teeth in the lions,  
They balked, hunching close, barking, cringing away.

And the famous crippled Smith forged a meadow  
Deep in a shaded glen for shimmering flocks to graze,  
With shepherds steadings, well roofed huts and sheepfolds.

And the crippled Smith brought all his art to bear  
On a dancing circle, broad as the circle Daedalus 690  
Once laid out on Cnossos' spacious fields  
For Ariadne the girl with lustrous hair.  
Here young boys and girls, beauties courted  
With costly gifts of oxen, danced and danced,  
Linking their arms, gripping each other's wrists.  
And the girls wore robes of linen light and flowing,  
The boys wore finespun tunics rubbed with a gloss of oil,  
The girls were crowned with a bloom of fresh garlands,  
The boys swung golden dagges hung on silver belts.  
And now they would run in rings on their skilled feet, 700  
Nimbly, quick as a crouching potter spins his wheel,  
Palming it smoothly, giving it practice twirls  
To see it run, and now they would run in rows,  
In rows crisscrossing rows – rapturous dancing.  
A breathless crowd stood round them struck with joy  
And through them a pair of tumblers dashed and sprang,  
Whirling in leaping handsprings, leading on the dance.

And he forged the Ocean River's mighty power girdling  
Round the outermost rim of the welded indestructible shield.

## APPENDIX C:

### THE SHIELD OF AGAMEMNON

Quoted from

And he grasped a well wrought shield to encase his body  
Forged for rushing forays – beautiful blazoned work.  
Circling the center, ten strong rings of bronze  
With twenty disks of glittering tin set in,  
At the heart a boss of bulging blue steel  
And there like a crown the Gorgon's grim mask –  
The burning eyes, the stark, transfixing horror-  
And round her strode the shapes of Rout and Fear.  
The shield-belt glinted silver and rip[pling on it ran  
A dark blue serpent, two heads coilig around a third,  
Reared from a single neck and twisting left and right.

40

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